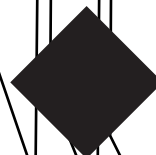
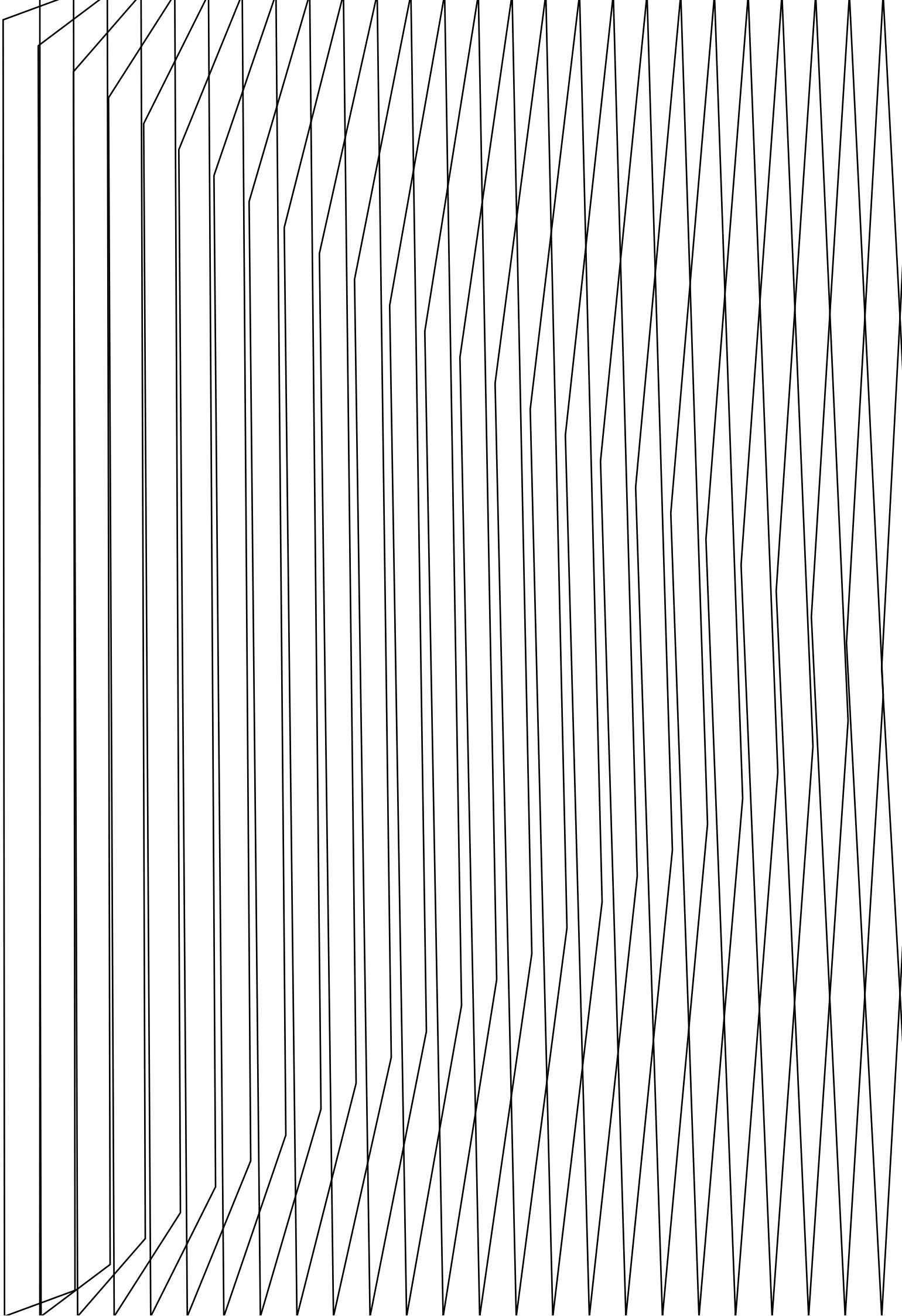


Technology:

blessing or burden?





Editorial

Knowledge used to be a cultural thing, related to the physical space a nation inhabited. This concept has been shifting throughout time. Once, what we knew was directly related to the geographical circle that was close to us. This circle has been growing and growing and has reached a point in modern society that was completely unpredictable. With the arrival of the Internet the world will never be the same. The physical borders that used to separate us faded away, turning the entirety of humanity into a Global Village. A new era was born to replace the Industrial Age: the Digital Era.

Information has never been shared so quickly or freely, with the possibility of reaching millions of people in a matter of seconds. No matter where you are born, where you live or what your family or friends are like, you can learn about completely different habits and cultures from around the world without leaving your house.

This has led to an exponential expansion of creativity, information, possibilities, and desires. Younger generations learn how to use a phone long before they know how to articulate, let alone read a book. We are growing amongst technological growth, and we are being raised in digitally dependent societies. This fact leads to a lot of changes in our behaviour and on how society works. Technology, in all its complexity, has brought us a lot of incredible changes, but also some negative ones. The Modern Window is the omnipresent screen in our daily lives that's used as a bridge to these possibilities.

It can be found in our phones that connect us to our friends, in our computers where we spend hours distracted or working, in the tablets we use to play, on television or the music players that entertain us with shows and music, in the street through digital panels with advertisements.

We are undoubtedly surrounded by it. Because of this, and referring to Neil Postman's quote, we ask the question: is technology a blessing or a burden?

Nowadays, some younger generations have already been born into this reality and are consequently growing up with its evolution.

There are a lot of shifting opinions concerning the attitudes and thoughts of these generations, relating to how this immersion of technology in their lives has shaped them. In this publication, what we wish to show is how the generation itself feels about these issues. How are they different from the previous ones? How does technology affect their routine and their lives in general?

While comparing the “Screen” to three other objects concerning metaphorical meaning, we are looking for both the positive and negative sides of this rise of technology to decide which factors are used as influences to this “Juventude em Marcha” (Youth in Motion). These three objects relate to the three themes we chose to approach: Information, Privacy and Identity, and Communication.

To reach some conclusions we organized three movie sessions followed by small informal talks with young students from different universities and backgrounds to see how they felt about different issues regarding the theme of technology.

Each film was related to a theme we considered relevant and wanted to approach. This publication, along with the digital platform we created, serves as a compendium of the opinions and thoughts shared in these meetings.

The publication includes excerpts from these conversations, whose participants were left anonymous in order to show how these varied opinions can reflect those of this generation in general, relating these to different pieces of text from writers that wrote about similar issues, as well as artworks and installations from different artists whose works can be related to the themes, more or less directly.

“Every technology is both a burden
and a blessing; not either-or,
but this-and-that.”

_Daniel J. Solove, “The Future of Reputation: Gossip, Rumor, and Privacy on the Internet”, 2007

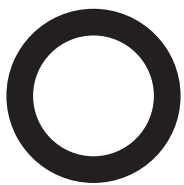
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the screen

as a window

do we see more





or do we see less?

The Screen is our new Window to the World. It is through it that we learn about different events and news that happen around us, both physically near to us or all over the planet.

Every day, we are used to having our screens completely invaded with all kinds of information and media. One would assume that this proliferation and easy access of information would make for the most informed generation that ever existed. However, this is not always true. This constant pollution of information and entertainment might have created a society that is easily entertained, but also used to switch from one piece of news to the next, not stopping to think about any of it. It has never been so easy to become a professional on any subject, but many people seem to be rather indifferent or apathetic to what's going on.

When does a lot of information become too much? Is this excess beginning to saturate us to the point we stop caring, or are we developing new capacities of filtering important information?

With this propagation of windows holding such heavy amounts of information, are we more conscious about what is going on around us, or have we become more indifferent to these?

Is this Modern Window making us see more or see less?

the screen

as a window

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*“There’s only so much wonder we can bear,
that’s why when you find any wonder whatsoever
you dole it out in meager portions, and only then
until it’s augmented and packaged and pumped
through ten thousand pre-assigned filters,
until it’s nothing more than a meaningless series
of lights, while we ride day-in, day-out — going where?
Powering what? All tiny cells in tiny screens
and bigger cells in bigger screens.”*

An excerpt of Bing’s speech to the Hot Shot juries.
 (“Black Mirror”: “Fifteen Million Merits”, Charlie Brooker,
 (s01ep02), 2011)

Black Mirror:

Fifteen Million Merits [s01ep02]

Charlie Brooker

2011



The British television anthology series “Black Mirror” intends to show the dark side of technology in our lives. The episode we chose, “Fifteen Million Merits”, represents a satire on entertainment shows and our insatiable thirst for distraction. In this futuristic dystopia, most citizens make a living by pedaling in bikes on a daily basis in order to generate power for their environment while earning a virtual currency called “merits”. They dwell in small, single-person cells, which afford little to no space for material possessions. However, the cell walls consist entirely of interactive display panels, so that the inhabitants can spend their disposable income on the consumption of entertainment and other digitized products. The privileged citizens of this system are usually the ones that can pedal enough to save fifteen million “merits”, and apply to the talent show Hot Shot, where, after a brief presentation of their talent, they are appreciated by three judges that might offer them the possibility to stop pedaling and work at a much easier job (that always involves the entertainment business). This episode portrays Bing, a normal working citizen that experiences the cruelty of this entertainment based system, when he spends all of his “merits” to offer a fellow worker, Abi, a chance to go on Hot Shot to prove her singing skills in search of something “real”. When she finished her audition, the three judges compliment her voice. However, they claim that they don’t have room for another “above-average singer”. Nonetheless, they still offer her a different opportunity to leave the bike for good. Due to her looks, they believe she would fit much better as a porn star on an erotica channel. After being pressured by the juries and having a lot of encouragement from the audience, Abi reluctantly agrees. After this event, Bing comes to a clearer realization of his society’s true values. Determined, he starts working his way to Hot Shot, to gather the fifteen million merits he needs to get in. After some time and hard work, he gets a chance to speak his mind in front the judges, which he does, with a piece of glass pointed to his neck. He tearfully rants about how unfair the system is, and about how heartless people have become, and expresses his anger for how the judges don’t see the people performing as people, but as assets to make money. The judges, instead of taking his words into consideration, are fascinated by his “performance” and offer him his own show, where he can rant about the system all he likes. Bing ends up accepting their offer and starts his own entertainment program. Now he can rant to his will about the unfairness of the system and how it is blinding and enslaving people, while he’s holding the same glass shard at his throat threatening the audience with the possibility of suicide. When he finished an episode of his “show”, we see that he now lives in a big open-spaced penthouse and he never has to worry about acquiring merits ever again. As the story comes to an end, he is seen staring out at a window to a vast natural landscape, which we as the viewers can interpret either as a real window or just another multi-screen.

This episode make us reflect on how entertainment can be used to rule our lives and turn us apathetic. As long as you are entertained or comfortable, it is easy to fall into life and let it pass without worrying about the meaning of it or about how society works. And even if we become aware of this reality, like Bing did, the system has its ways to drag us back into it. What is frightening is that everything that Bing believes in is turned into just another form of entertainment and consequently loses its meaning.

Technology has good and bad parts.

The goal of our project is to reflect on different aspects of technology, focusing on its duality associated with our lives.

How do you think this movie is related to the times we are living in?

Consider the smartphone, for example: it's a five year old invention. It's only been five years since we've had the internet in our pocket, and now, you go to any café in Lisbon, or anywhere in the world,

and everyday you see a group of kids sitting together at the table and all staring at their screens. And it's only been five years since we've had this technology.

If you multiply these five years by ten, you can picture a world that's even more focused on the virtual world.

This film showed us a very scary vision of how the world can look. Of course it is science-fiction but at the same time it is very realistic. For instance, all the objects and devices used by the characters already exist in our lives, even the obsession over reality shows is pretty accurate with our times.

I think what's really shocking is the ending part. When the main character has this big speech about what is going on in his head about the system, and in the end he conforms with the system because he is offered a comfortable situation. Taking all the wrath he felt, and all his ideas, and then using them as entertainment.

It's sort of what we can observe in society right now: everything can be made into entertainment, and that's all that matters to individuals.

Do you think we are more informed than ever or not really, because of this constant abundance of information and trivialization of subjects?

I think so, for sure. Maybe more in a superficial way though! You won't study something for hours in a library, now you can study ten things at the same time on your computer.

I don't particularly think it's worse, or better, than in the past, I just think it's a revolutionary change.

But also with the amount of information that's going around, lots of things become relatively unimportant.

Today, every day on the news we hear about a group of soldiers getting blown down, 30 refugees dying, and such tragedy is so constant that it becomes insignificant. Last time we heard about a tragedy, an orphanage being burnt down or hundreds of people dying, how many of us actually cared about it?

You make a hashtag out of it.

You give it a moment of thought, and then you keep on going with your day because it's so common. But what can you actually do?

It's not a question about what you can do, it's how you react to it.

There's a sea of chaos, and so every drop becomes so insignificant. Whereas before, when there was not that much information, every catastrophe was really big.

Take for example, that a natural disaster would occur and no one could hear about it. You would never be able to send help to the people affected by it. When these things happen it's natural to ask for help and to try to raise awareness.

Nowadays we're all connected; you can reach more people, and help more people as well.

"When a population becomes distracted by trivia, when cultural life public conversation becomes a form of baby-talk, when, in short, is redefined as a perpetual round of entertainments, when serious a people become an audience, and their public business a vaudeville act, then a nation finds itself at risk; culture-death is a clear possibility."

_Neil Postman, "Amusing Ourselves To Death: Public Discourse in the Age Of Show Business", 2005

“As a practical matter I’ve learned to seek the minimum amount of technology for myself that will create the maximum amount of choices for myself and others. The cybernetician Heinz von Foerster called this approach the Ethical Imperative, and he put it this way: “Always act to increase the number of choices.” The way we can use technologies to increase choices for others is by encouraging science, innovation, education, literacies, and pluralism. In my own experience this principle has never failed: In any game, increase your options.”

_Kevin Kelly, “What Technology Wants”, 2010



Woman experimenting with “TEXT RAIN”, 1999

“What the Net seems to be doing is chipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation. Whether I’m online or not, my mind now expects to take in information the way the Net distributes it: in a swiftly moving stream of particles. Once I was a scuba diver in the sea of words. Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski.”

_Nicholas Carr, “The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains”, 2010

Bill Viola's "Reverse Television", 1983-1984

Portraits of Viewers, Collection Mnam / Cci, Centre Pompidou, Paris




Reverse Television

Bill Viola

1983

Reverse Television is a series of forty-four video portraits made by American video artist Bill Viola in 1983, originally produced for broadcast television and later documented as a 15 minute video. These portraits depict people throughout Boston sitting in their living rooms, silently staring at the video camera as though it were a TV set. The portraits were meant to take fit into the space normally occupied by television commercials and as such to "interrupt the continuity of the undifferentiated flow of the television picture, giving viewers the possibility of pondering their own position facing the screen."

Viola inverts the position and gaze of the television, we are now the viewer of a viewer, and from the position of the screen, "Reverse Television" makes us more aware of how sedentary we have become. In the old days, people would've thought that sitting for so many hours in front of a screen was an absurd idea. Now, that has become something vulgar. This constant staring of the screen applies to all generations of today, this screen being a television, a tablet, a phone or a computer. This modern window has interrupted our day-to-day lives as parts of a physical society and has taken over many hours of our schedule. Does this constant entertainment, received while simply sitting down, allow us to be more in touch with what is going on in the world, or has it become a lazy way of spending our time, mindlessly looking at information, without actually memorizing or caring about its content?



Do you think it's a problem of our generation or of our time? People say our generation doesn't care, and that all we care about is taking selfies and our profiles on Facebook...

It's not true. There are people like that in every generation.

People realize that we have much more access to information. I believe we're more informed as a generation. Maybe we seem more indifferent to other people, but I think everybody is.

Where do you think this indifference comes from?

It could come from this idea of how we are living our lives right now.

Our generation is simultaneously the one that's more adapted to using technology to our will, for entertainment or for learning or for connecting to each other.

And at the same time, we are at the mercy of this technology, to the point that we would rather spend days alone with the internet sometimes, than spend the day with our friends.

Technology connects us maybe in a digital world, but in the real world we feel disconnected from each other, we feel like we don't have the same contact with people like we used to. We have friends from other countries and we keep in touch with them as opposed to our neighbors. And that's something old generations couldn't have. So how our generation uses technology, it's both a scary thing in what it can become, and also a very hopeful thing if you could really harvest the power of technology.

I think that people use technology to get in touch with people.

The Internet came with this great possibility to share opinions and points of views with others, in a way that would be impossible without it.

But, then again we're blinded by information, the internet is a big place, and the useful things become dim in the midst of all opinions and feeds and news. But at the same time it's good, because before, all the information you got came from a controlled source of people that decided what kind of information would come out to the public. And now we have this place where we can go and anyone can have access to it but at the same time everything can get lost in a sea of opinions.

We get to see more sides to a story, so you can get a bigger, more realistic, idea of the world.

Also it allows people who wouldn't usually have this kind of possibility, to have a voice to express themselves.

Anyone can have a voice now.

Yeah, before you had your place geographically and your traditional local knowledge that would increase as the commercial, social and cultural exchanges would increase.

But now we can stand in the same place and get connected to all kinds of different ideas, thoughts, and cultures.

I think this is what is lacking in that movie because it takes out the social aspect of it and it makes it seem like 'games, games, games'. It's an exaggeration from one point of view, obviously, but it's very unidirectional and it totally ignores some other really important aspects.

"Everything in our background has prepared us to know and resist a prison when the gates begin to close around us . . . But what if there are no cries of anguish to be heard? Who is prepared to take arms against a sea of amusements? To whom do we complain, and when, and in what tone of voice, when serious discourse dissolves into giggles? What is the antidote to a culture's being drained by laughter?"

__Neil Postman, "Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business", 2005

TEXT RAIN

Camille Utterback

1999

TEXT RAIN consists of two large parallel screens: one features projected video, while the other serves as a backdrop. These two screens form a corridor and project the people passing on the screen in black and white, while a rain of coloured letters fall steadily from the top of the screen. They cease to fall wherever the letters come in contact with the viewer's image, making visual and verbal patterns by holding the letters in their hands or along their arms. Depending on how we "catch" the falling letters, the text can make sense or not, but it's the viewers' role to give meaning to whatever words they're able to form. When one or more letters are lost or the letters of another word intervene, *TEXT RAIN* becomes a kinetic poem—one that re-forms itself before your eyes. Turning could become tuning; limb, limbo. Often, the letters that rain down offer only nonsense, but sometimes they make just enough sense to encourage the viewers to find meaning.

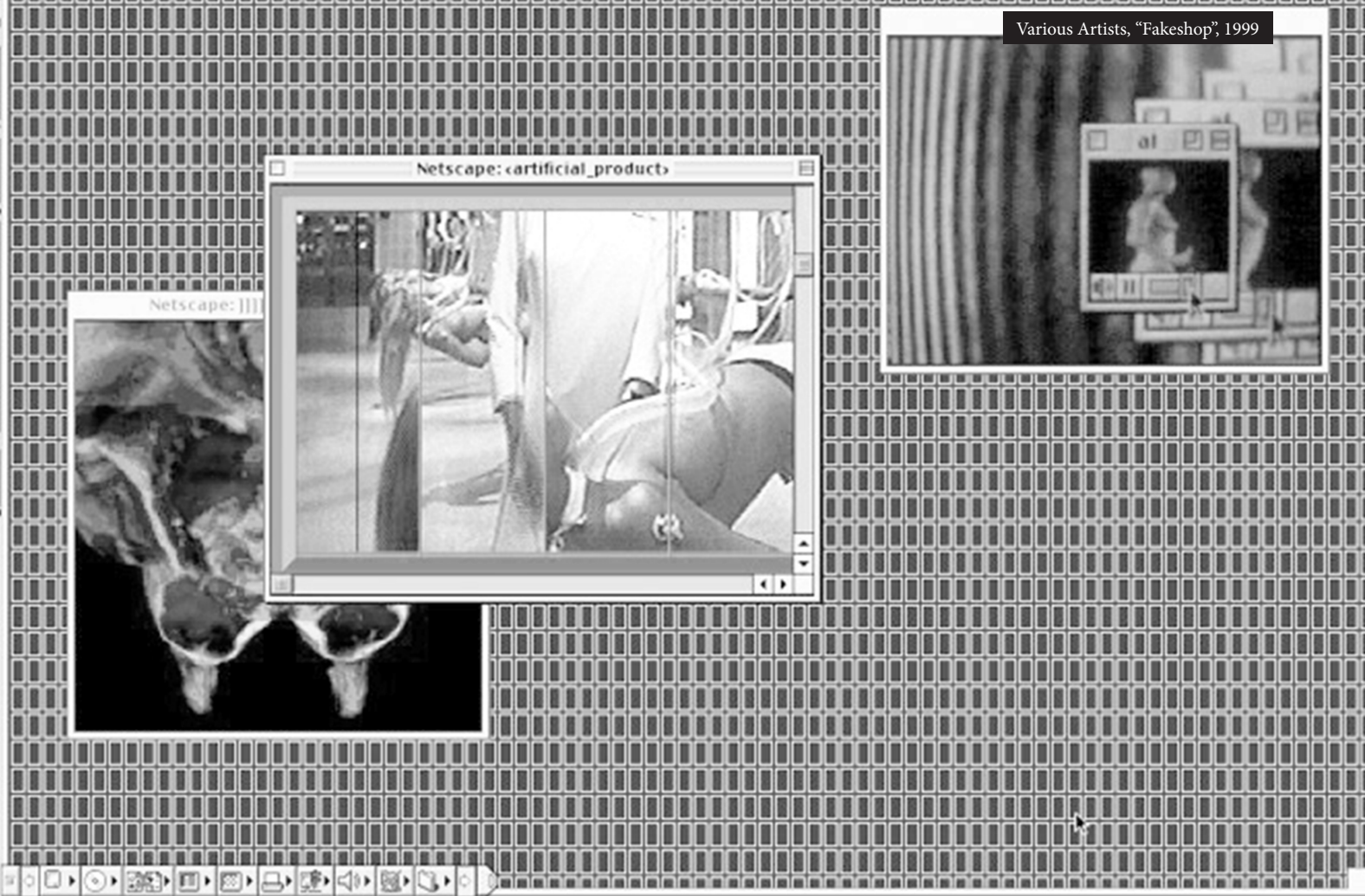
This installation can be a metaphor to the screen we are used to dealing with in our everyday lives. This screen can be overwhelming, constantly bombarding us with information, which we can easily get lost in. As the generation who grew up surrounded by all of these interfaces we have developed a sharper capacity of filtering information. *TEXT RAIN* is a piece that depends of the viewers/participants interaction; it is a reflection of us seen as data filters.

Most interfaces are not simply storers of information, they are also, to us, a multimedia experience, sometimes even an extension of ourselves onto the virtual world.

"The old technologies lose their economic and cultural force. They become progress' dead ends. It's the new technologies that govern production and consumption, that guide people's behavior and shape their perceptions. That's why the future of knowledge and culture no longer lies in books or newspapers or TV shows or radio programs or records or CDs. It lies in digital files shot through our universal medium at the speed of light."

_Nicholas Carr, "The Shallows: What The Internet Is Doing To Our Brains", 2011





Various Artists, "Fakeshop", 1999

Fakeshop

Various Artists

1999

Created by Jeff Gomper, Prema Murthy, and Eugene Thacker, the "Fakeshop" project is represented by an elaborate Website. We can see multiple windows, offering streams of information (text, stills, and video), reported through a richly layered interface. It is an example of electronic audio/visual transfer that can occur in real time. It is a collage of different times and places. It combines installation, Web, and performance elements. The experience offered was both physical and virtual: it was an exhibit that a user could enter and explore, and it was a Web presence. The text window, for example, holds logs of chats recorded from past performances, as people from around the world are chatting in real time.

The modern window is not only the screen in itself, but also all the sites that it can hold, with images, videos and text.

The appearance of "Fakeshop" seems very familiar to us, we've seen it before many times in our desktop. It is disorganised and diverse. People's first reaction to this chaotic universe, when the first interfaces appeared, was to marvel in its confusion. But more and more we're growing into it and getting more use of its form, and once we learn to cope with that universe we allow ourselves millions of possibilities. Accessing all sorts of information, creating and inventing new things and communicating to each other. At the time, it was a real surprise for most people who visited this piece to chat in real time with people from all over the world. Nowadays, we are all used to this instantaneity when connecting to others. It is also an aesthetic example of the never-ending visual and informational contents we deal with every day.

The movie is trying to show us that if pushed to that extreme human beings would be satisfied by anything.

We would forsake our human interactions just to be safe within our space and to have that room with the screen and a bed. If they could come up with that place where they knew that every human being could survive and gave us money for food or miles for food, we would be conformed with that without even caring about everything else.

I think that is where we are heading. Everything that exists becomes entertainment, like the news, hashtags, etc. Everyone is offered ways to be entertained, comfortable and satisfied all the time.

Even if we find out that we are imprisoned in this system, we don't care about it because we are quite comfortable with it, so why change?

You probably wouldn't get lost as many times as you do, when you're scrolling down randomly on a social network. You have unlimited access to all sorts of information that you start not caring about stuff. This wouldn't happen if you actually knew more about yourself and what you wanted.

And you could be more selective about the information you search for online.

Now speaking of your own circle of friends, I don't think that it is a bad thing for a person to connect more with other people around the world rather than to the people that they live next to. If we were limited to our own neighborhood, we might never find people to truly connect with. There are so many people out there and, because you can reach a wider circle, you will easily find people with whom you relate to. Maybe more than the people close to you. So you can choose to be closer to the people that are closer to you in thoughts and ideas.

The Internet makes it possible to find people like you so you don't feel so lonely.

For some people this is really important.

I think that it's a matter of balance.

I decided, for example, not to bring my laptop with me when I go to bed, or else I know I am not going to sleep. I am just going to spend the whole night looking at it.

But that's what they got us used to. We are given all these pretty gadgets. It's like this new toy that you are so excited about and you fall for it more and more, everybody does. And we reached this point that we're weird if we don't have Facebook or something like that. But I think it's like what we were saying, there's both good and bad points.

I'm definitely happy that I can grow around all these things that are going on in the world.

I admit that sometimes I get a little too attached to these gadgets too, and I waste my time with random articles and videos.

I am not sure. Maybe we are starting to see how Facebook is going to affect us. We had Facebook for ten years. I have two little brothers, and they're ten years old, and all they want to get on Facebook. There's no age limit for it, so there's no reason why they can't. They just want to be on it so that they can play their own games.

But do they also enjoy being out and talking to people?

They come home and the first thing they do is to get on the tablets, on the iPads, to play the videogames. I mean, maybe that is not a sign of where we're heading but it is a sign of what we have become.

So if the screen can be a window, does it allow us to see more or does it make us see less?

We see so many things at the same time. Does it make us more conscious or more indifferent?

I think it makes us more indifferent, due to the constant effort to raise our awareness to everything. I'm not saying that we shouldn't be informed about the world, I just feel that we're being constantly exposed to things that we can handle only for a certain time.

I disagree; I think we are more and more conscious about a lot of things.

The internet allowed us to choose for the first time what we wanted to know about and also to research it intensively. We do care about a lot of things.

Nowadays it's impossible not to be aware about the planet's destruction, the companies that rule the world, the state of so many countries in Europe, for example, that are being almost bullied into economic policies...

The only thing is, yes we are more conscious, but I think it's hard to make things happen, simply because we're so lost about what to do...

Seduction of a Cyborg

Lynn Hershman Leeson

1994

"Seduction of a Cyborg" is a poetic allegory film about our addiction to technology and its invasion of the human body, depicting the possible consequences that may arise from mixing the two.

Lynn Hershman Leeson tells us the story of a young blind girl, with very acute hearing, that submits herself to laser rays to restore her sight.

When exposed to the virtual world that the computer offers, she is more and more seduced by the images produced. As a repercussion of this addiction, her immune system suffers and she becomes a witness to the pollution of history, while succumbing to her fate.

Although this short-film may be a bit dated, it is still accurate as it describes the perception we have when we are in contact with the computer for the first time and how we become seduced by the possibilities and content it allow us to see. All the dystopian aftermath is nothing but exaggerated, but it serves as a fair warning that no matter how dazzling something might seem it isn't healthy to give up the physical world to sit in front of a screen full-time. In a time where more and more hours of our days are spent looking at a screen, it is tempting to fall into the bubble of the virtual world, caring less and less about the physical one, but it is important to make the distinction between the two, evaluating what our priorities are.

"As a tool, evolution is good for three things:

How to get somewhere you want but can't find the

route to. How to get to somewhere you can't imagine.

How to open up entirely new places to get to."

_Kevin Kelly, "Bootstrapping Complexity", 2011

Lynn Hershman Leeson, "Byte Me", Cyborg Series, 2001

"We know the air is unfit to breathe and our food is unfit to eat. And we sit watching our TVs while some local newscaster tells us that today we had fifteen homicides and sixty-three violent crimes, as if that's the way it's supposed to be! We all know things are bad - worse than bad - they're crazy. It's like everything everywhere is going crazy, so we don't go out any more. We sit in the house, and slowly the world we're living in is getting smaller, and all we say is, "Please, at least leave us alone in our living rooms. Let me have my toaster and my TV and my steel-belted radials, and I won't say anything. Just leave us alone." Well, I'm not going to leave you alone. I want you to get mad!"


_Sidney Lumet, "Network", 1976

the screen

as a mirror

does it allow us to reflect ourselves





and who gets to see this reflection?

Our devices contain most of our lives inside of them, from important documents to really precious memories. Also, through them, we share a reflection of our persona to the rest of the world through social media, while observing the reflections that other wish (or not) to share.

If our devices are a reflection of our lives and who we are, the Screen becomes a Mirror.

However, the Web allows us to recreate, share and exaggerate a lot of those life experiences on a global scale. It is even possible to fake entire lives via the Internet. This inevitable sharing of data will leave a permanent digital footprint that can be accessed by any entity with the power to do so, and then can be used in any way that they please. Never before has any other generation had its privacy so limited. The screen is a mirror where we can reflect an image of ourselves and of our lives, yet with this ability comes the risk that anyone can view our information and use it without our control.

Are the infinite possibilities of sharing and exploring our personality worth this unpredictable control over our data?

the screen

as a mirror

does it allow us to reflect ourselves

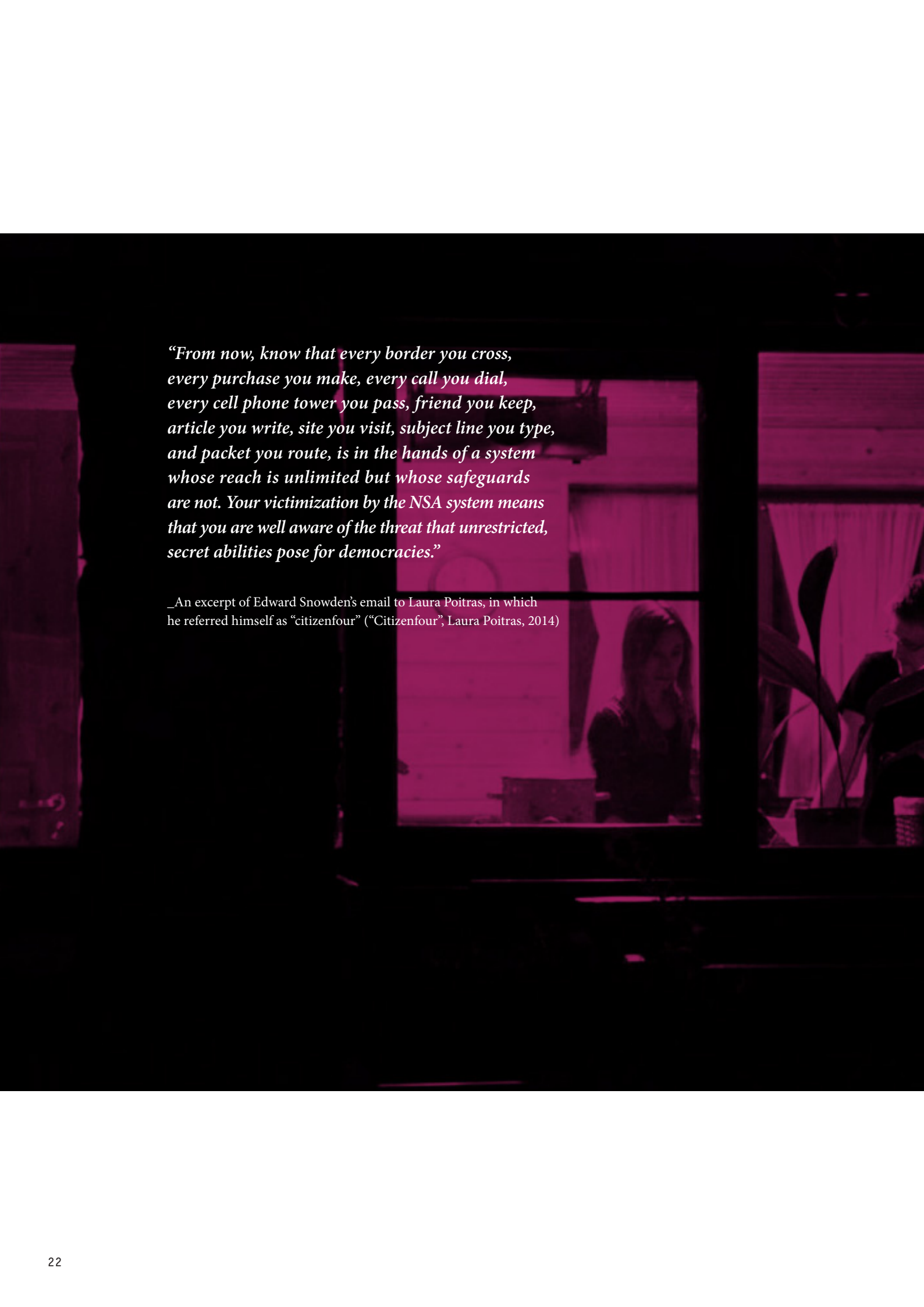
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*“From now, know that every border you cross,
every purchase you make, every call you dial,
every cell phone tower you pass, friend you keep,
article you write, site you visit, subject line you type,
and packet you route, is in the hands of a system
whose reach is unlimited but whose safeguards
are not. Your victimization by the NSA system means
that you are well aware of the threat that unrestricted,
secret abilities pose for democracies.”*

An excerpt of Edward Snowden's email to Laura Poitras, in which
he referred himself as “citizenfour” (“Citizenfour”, Laura Poitras, 2014)

Citizenfour

Laura Poitras

2014



After an exchange of several encrypted email messages between Snowden and two journalists, Laura Poitras and Glen Greenwald, they decided to meet in Hong Kong where “Citizen Four”, or Edward Snowden, decides to reveal more about NSA’s security programs (National Security Agency). Snowden is known today as the ex-government employee who exposed one of the biggest global surveillance programs from the US Government to the world. The movie shows us the interviews that followed that week in Hong Kong, where Snowden demonstrated several documents and presentations from the NSA. These reveal a mass surveillance program that includes every citizen, whether not they are a threat to national security, and whether they are American citizens or not. This was all possible through the collection of metadata that can be described as “data description”. By collecting metadata, they could make lists of data of specific things or places, such as lists of people who have bought specific books or lists of people online at a certain place at a specific time. They could track citizens by their use of technology (through their phones, bank cards and internet use). All these technological moves would leave a digital footprint that would be put together, creating a pretty accurate profile of any user.

After four days of interviews, Snowden’s identity was made public at his request. Facing potential extradition and prosecution in the United States, Snowden schedules a meeting with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and applies for refugee status. Some days later, Poitras believes she is being followed and leaves Hong Kong for Berlin.

This documentary focuses on a great topic of our lives today: for the first time in mankind history, we are being confronted by an absolute violation of privacy. Without our knowledge, it’s possible for any kind of entity to use our information at their own will, without any kind of consent by the user. Nowadays, it’s so much easier to have access to someone’s information, as we reflect everything we are on the tools we use. Digital technology is designed to be personal, mobile and customizable to a level where we can transport everything from our daily lives in our pockets. Losing that tool represents a loss almost as big as losing our identity. This film won the Academy Award for Best Documentary in 2015, and leaves us with the alarming vision of the way that our digital footprint is permanent and can be accessed by without limitations. Knowing that this collection of information is so complex and is constantly stored, it is scary to think of the possibilities of how this information can be used in the future.

Today there's this issue of privacy.

Did you know about this reality of the NSA or was it all very shocking?

I think people have this perception of being watched, but they don't make much of a big deal out of it.

It's like this big conspiracy of Big Brother watching you. We've been thinking about the possibility of this happening one day. But in 2013 when Edward Snowden came out with this information we finally realized that this was actually happening! And it was a scary realization.

It's important for people to know that nearly every service and program that we use on the internet has an alternative.

Most people think that the only way to search for anybody or anything is to do a Google search. That's not the case, you can use DuckDuckGo, you can use Ixquick, you can use Startpage. All of these alternatives, (they might not be as fancy or aesthetically pleasing as Google) won't compromise your privacy like the mainstream ones do. For example, instead of using iTunes —like all of us here probably do — you can use Winamp, which is just going to play your music but at least it's not owned by Apple. So it might not sell your information to some other company. Or instead of using Google Chrome or Safari you can use Mozilla Firefox or, if you wanna go really undercover, you can use the Tor Browser. You know, instead of using Gmail or Hotmail, you can use GMX, which is much better... For programs like Skype, you have TOX, which are just as good as the rest...

The only reason so many people use AOL, Microsoft, Skype, Google, Facebook is just because everyone knows how to use them, and because they are so widely advertised.

You don't know to what extent these alternative companies might also be involved in accessing or spreading your information.

The question is why aren't that many people looking for alternatives?

If you look at the mainstream public, not many people are looking for alternatives and I don't think it's because they aren't informed about these programs' existence.

You can obviously choose alternatives but you know most of your friends are going to choose the mainstream one, so why would you choose the alternatives?

You just want to find your friends. And the probability of doing it is much wider if you use Facebook. So the only good thing I can point out on Facebook is, because this service is so mainstream, that we can reach for a wider public and more easily find people we want to have contact with.

It's almost a necessity. We are introduced to all these things without really realizing it. They have put the candy in front of us, and we became attracted to this lifestyle, kind of addicted to it. And now, all of the sudden, we find out that we got pushed into these things — like using credit cards, and phones and Facebook. And now we realize that all of this information is being kept and we don't know how it could be used. That's what's very worrying.

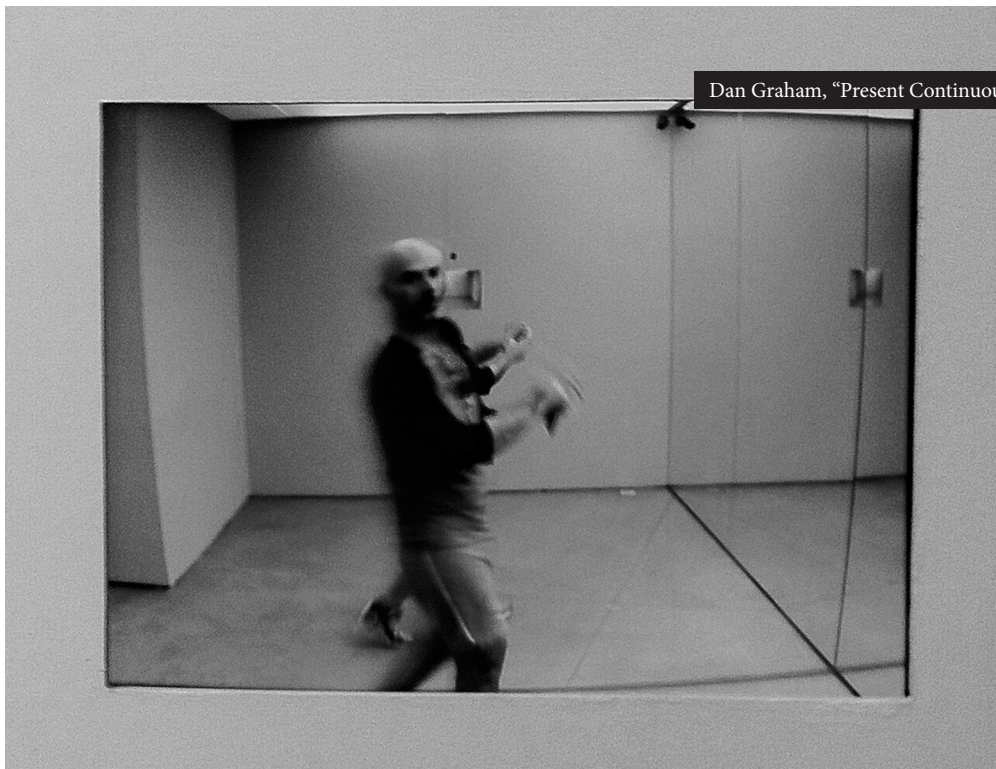
Sure it's very useful to use Facebook these days just like using Google. Google is the greatest company in the world. It's the most useful company for any person. Everything they give us is free. Every service they have is free.

"The internet allows information to flow more freely than ever before. We can communicate and share ideas in unprecedented ways. These developments are revolutionizing our self-expression and enhancing our freedom."

_Daniel J. Solove, "The Future of Reputation: Gossip, Rumor, and Privacy on the Internet", 2007

“The internet, as its proponents rightly remind us, makes for variety and convenience; it does not force anything upon you. Only it turns out it doesn’t feel like that at all. We don’t feel as if we had freely chosen our online practices. We feel instead that they are habits we have helplessly picked up or that history has enforced, that we are not distributing our attention as we intend or even like to.”

_Nicholas Carr, “The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains”, 2011



Dan Graham, “Present Continuous Past”, 1974

“No matter the specific techniques involved, historically mass surveillance has had several constant attributes. Initially, it is always the country’s dissidents and marginalized who bear the brunt of the surveillance, leading those who support the government or are merely apathetic to mistakenly believe they are immune. And history shows that the mere existence of a mass surveillance apparatus, regardless of how it is used, is in itself sufficient to stifle dissent. A citizenry that is aware of always being watched quickly becomes a compliant and fearful one.”

_Glenn Greenwald, “No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA, and the U.S. Surveillance State”, 2014

Present Continuous Past

Dan Graham

1974

This artwork is a room with mirrored walls, a video camera and a screen below the camera. The mirrors reflect present time, and the video camera tapes what is immediately in front of it and the entire reflection on the opposite mirrored wall. The screen plays the recordings 8 seconds later, and if you can see the reflection of the screen in the mirror, it will be playing what happened 8 seconds before that. This mechanism produces the artwork's perpetual effect.

The time-lag creates this effect of self-consciousness. When one enters the room, one will react automatically to the mirrors – adjusting appearances and so on. However, the time-lag means that looking in the camera will only show 8 seconds later, and the inability to react automatically allows us to see ourselves in a natural state, or as how others would perceive us to be. This impression is something we rarely see and it makes the viewer self-conscious because he now knows how others perceive him (in the physical sense). In the artist statement, Graham writes that the artwork is about exploring other ways of seeing yourself and learning about yourself.

When an individual uses the internet, whatever profile he chooses to make of himself will make others define how he seems to be. Through this, he is able to take a step back and try to imagine how others perceive him according to this information. It is a much more conscious perception of himself than when he is simply acting in natural time. Maybe through this, it is possible for this individual to re-think how he acts in normal life, adjusting his attitudes according to what he considers to be the best he wants to be.

But why is it that Google and these kinds of services are free? How do they get money?

They get it from advertisements and from selling information. Of course we're going to keep using these services, but we have to think of the costs. Who's paying the bill? We are paying this bill, behind the curtain!

What are the consequences of this massive data collection and what consequences will it have for our future?"

Our entire life is in a file somewhere. They can easily know if you did something that might go against what whatever person, government or country stands for, and they can use this to go "back to the past" and retrace all of your steps and charge you for some insignificant crime you might have done.

But many people find it fun to check their own profile and everything they ever said and put online, they can go back to 2010 and see who they were, what were they doing, how they used to think. And I think, as we are recording these things, we're already kind of shaping our minds through it.

This whole idea of how people are more and more allowed to document their lives never happened before to this extent.

Dan Graham in his installation "Present Continuous Past", 1975





Woman experimenting Dan Graham's installation "Present Continuous Past", 1983

But this desire of documenting things has always existed: when people wrote in their diaries or when people went somewhere on purpose to take family photos. These are very specific memories you can have and access any time.

The difference between now and then is that when you put that information online everyone can access it.

Not just us but our friends, relatives or strangers!

They use the terms and conditions against us, putting the information in little letters assuming what always happens: that you're not going to read it.

When you agree with it you're basically agreeing with letting them use all of your information and you can't complain about it.

Before, publicity was made for a group of people; they would try to reach small groups of people one at the time.

Now publicity is becoming something more and more personally direct.

Every Facebook post and every YouTube or Google search recognizes what you search so they can offer you other recommendations or products.

"The faster we surf across the surface of the Web - the more links we click and pages we view - the more opportunities Google gains to collect information about us and to feed us advertisements. Its advertising system, moreover, is explicitly designed to figure out which messages are most likely to grab our attention and then to place those messages in our field of view. Every click we make on the Web marks a break in our concentration, a bottom-up disruption of our attention - and it's in Google's economic interest to make sure we click as often as possible."

_Nicholas Carr, "The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains", 2011





Body Press

Dan Graham

1970-1972

From the late 1960's into the late 70's, Dan Graham shifted towards a largely performance-based practice, incorporating film and the new medium of video in his systematic investigations of cybernetics, phenomenology and embodiment.

"Body Press" features the interaction of two cameras or the juxtaposition of two films, in which a naked man and woman stand back-to-back in a cylinder lined with concave mirrors filming themselves and their distorted reflections. This introduces the mirrored image as a prominent theme for Graham, which he would explore extensively in his performance and video practice. Graham has stated that his works are "models to define the limits of an idea of representation as the conventional limits which necessarily define the situation between the artist and spectator". This work stands as a metaphor of our interactions with other people, in a digital era like ours. Many people would state that we are more isolated thanks to the advent of all of these devices and the Internet. Some will agree that most of us would rather be distracted with our phones and laptops than paying attention to the ones right next to us, in the real world.

In this Dan Graham piece we have two bodily entities standing close but back-to-back, not seeing each other directly, but through a distorted filmed reflection. In this digital era, that's how we see most of the people we know, not in real life contact but through distorted representations of them, in this virtual world where we all connect.

"I was enthusiastic about the online workshops as 'identity workshops' when they first appeared, and all of their possibilities remain. Creating an avatar - perhaps of a different age, a different gender, a different temperament - is a way to explore the self."

_Sherry Turkle, "Alone Together", 2012

It's a service, and you're using that service. And that's the thing we never had before:

We never have been so addicted to another service like this.

What's a really annoying is the fact that these whistleblowers come out and the big entities focus so much on trying to show these people as unpatriotic.

They care more about fighting this one person, keeping them out of the country and putting them in prison than actually focusing on what matters: the fact that we're all being used by the services without knowing about it. Nobody reads the terms and conditions. It's a very wide document on purpose. They don't really want you to read it.

They don't want you to know about this reality. And even after we know about it we don't really do anything about it.

We just really want to use the service, so we ignore it.

It's not easy. You are giving all of your information, all of your photos, and before you even know it, Facebook is going to share it with someone else. We already knew that Facebook was going to keep all of this given information forever, when you sign the terms and conditions, but we don't know how it will be used in the future. I think the scariest part is that a lot of our friends talk about this invasion of privacy on the Internet, and most of them just say they don't care.

Since they have nothing to hide, they have nothing to fear.

It's not far from the truth that people know they're being watched, and they slowly can be controlled. You're not going to search "how to build an atom bomb" as freely as you'd would. It's like Snowden was saying in the movie: it cuts you out of your intellectual freedom to know more things because you're scared of what this would say about you.

Nosce Te Ipsum

Tiffany Holmes

2000

On a large scrim hanging from the ceiling, we see projected a contour drawing of an androgynous human figure.

As the artists puts it: "As you move closer to the image, you see a line of words across a floor dotted with circular targets. As you walk forward, following the words, you trip a pressure sensor that triggers a change in the animation. Suddenly, layers pull back and reveal that beneath the drawn body lies an interior composed of flesh, letters, words, and marks. Stepping on each target triggers another sensor and a continued shift in the animation as the body folds back on itself, revealing layers of images that give way to further images. When you step on the final sensor, your face, captured in real time with a video camera, appears beneath the embedded layers.

'Nosce Te Ipsum' is a digital collage but it turns out to be also a mirror, because it reveals its viewer behind layers of self-dissecting images.

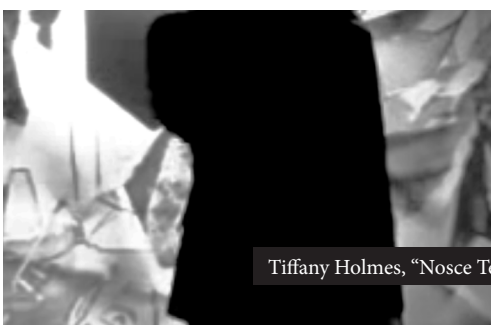
As we walk, we analyse our relationship with the digital application; 'Nosce' is a lesson in digital design and a comment on how digital applications affect us as viewers or users.

"In order to reveal the final image, you must participate in the dissection process... Your steps, timed as you choose, alter the projected body, penetrating the palimpsests of imagery that pull back, one after another, to reveal your face within the larger work". As we interact with 'Nosce Te Ipsum', we make (or unmake) a picture of ourselves.

But 'Nosce' is not a transparent window. We do not look through this piece to an imagined world, and we never forget that we are interacting with a digital interface. 'Nosce' shows us how a user interface can reflect us as we use it. These different layers, complicated and multi-textured, refer to our own personalities, equally different and varied. When reflecting on ourselves as we decide what layers to show through technology, we can choose more or less loyal representations of us, adorned with imagination, or straight to the point.

"And one thing we should all understand is that we are brutally honest with search engines. You show me your search history, and I'll find something incriminating or something embarrassing there in five minutes. We are more honest with our search engines than we are with our families. Search engines know more about you than your family members know about you."

_Mikko Hypponen, "How the NSA Betrayed the World's Trust" at TedxBussels, 2013



Tiffany Holmes, "Nosce Te Ipsum" installation stills, 2000

"Taken in its entirety, the Snowden archive led to an ultimately simple conclusion: the US government had built a system that has as its goal the complete elimination of electronic privacy worldwide. Far from hyperbole, that is the literal, explicitly stated aim of the surveillance state: to collect, store, monitor, and analyze all electronic communication by all people around the globe. The agency is devoted to one overarching mission: to prevent the slightest piece of electronic communication from evading its systemic grasp."

_Glenn Greenwald, "No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA, and the U.S. Surveillance State", 2014



Lynn Hershman Leeson in "Constructing Roberta", 1975. Film by Eleanor Coppola

Alter-Ego

Lynn Hershman Lesson

1973-1979

For the past forty years, Hershman Leeson has worked in performance, moving image, drawing, collage, text-based work, site-specific interventions, and later new media/digital technologies, and interactive net-based works, making her one of the first truly multi-disciplinary artists.

This complexity is best manifested in Hershman Leeson's seminal project "The Roberta Breitmore Series" (1974-1978) whose importance, nearly forty years on, cannot be over-estimated. "Roberta Breitmore" is Hershman Leeson's Alter-Ego, conceived by the artist, constructed and 'developed' as a fictional persona. The creation consisted not only of a physical self-transformation through make-up, clothing, and wigs which enabled the occasional role-playing, but a fully-fledged, complete personality that existed over an extended period of time and whose existence could be proven in the world through physical evidence: from a driver's license and credit card to letters from her psychiatrist.

The questions it raised about the ungraspable, fluid state of identity, about 'truth' and 'authenticity'. Also, it presents us the difficulty to often draw the line between fact and fiction, biography and autobiography, the impossibility of knowing thyself.

Especially, in our conscious culture of appearances, the creation of an image and self-styling have increasing importance attached to it. We make believe we are what we seem to be, nowadays, by sharing diverse data such as photos, videos, tweets, posts, etc...

What Hershman Lesson created nearly forty years ago, now with the advent of the Internet, can be created by each one of us. It is that easy to create fictional personas and profiles; to pretend to be someone else; to be another version of ourselves, perhaps a better version, or just someone that's our complete opposite. The emergence of virtual identities is nothing more than the result of all these possibilities that the Internet can give us and we can make the most of it by exploring it to new levels of self.

There was a quote in the film that I really liked:

“What you used to call freedom is now called privacy.”

And I never thought about it that way.

It's a new concept of freedom and a very scary one because, at this point, we know this information is being kept and we know how it's being used and the marketing schemes attached to it. So what they are creating here is possibly the biggest weapon of massive oppression ever built! And we will never know if there is or isn't some oppressive entity like in “1984” who's checking all the steps you're making, all the searches you've ever done and tagging you as a potential criminal against the system based on that information. Something like that already exists, because when you buy certain books on Amazon, they will add you to a sort of black list, so they keep you under their vigilance. So all of this information has already been organized in a file and we don't know what they are going to do with it.

But there's also a good part: you being able to share and be connected to other people and also this idea of being able to explore different personalities online.

Which is also pretty interesting! You know, you could be anybody! You could be a 60-year-old man from Costa Rica, without actually being that. You could assume different personalities and different explorations of who you can be with this platform. Have any of you ever pretended to be someone else?

Almost everyone tried at least once. But some also do that in real life too, although some lies are harder to make other people believe in them.

No, I am not talking about the movie. I am talking about this whole situation, even if there's only a very (not so important) positive side...

Like for example, YouTube (just like Google) lists your preferences. I know this isn't so relevant but you could find out another cool song because of the cool song you just listened to or have another list of really interesting recommended articles.

Let me give a hypothetical good point — and this obviously never happens — it would be good in a terrorist attack, if somebody said “ok, I am going to kill this guy tonight” and this person gets caught. Well, supposedly. I don't know if this is all true but I've heard there are a lot of terroristic attempts being stopped by computer intervention. At least, that's what they're saying...

Yes, but that's how this whole this situation started. It was after 9/11 for that cause.

Still all those big terroristic corporations, they can easily avoid being detected if they want. They know how not to be tracked.

So is this so called “surveillance” protecting us that much?

Each one of us is just a little grain of sand; they're not going to check all of us.

I believe that most people who say they don't have ‘anything to hide’ think like this. You're one of 7 billion people on this Earth and only one-third uses the Internet.

This idea that if you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear, was also a part of the Nazi propaganda. You know you should be worried if a policy of a country in the 21st century comes from a quote from the Nazi propaganda.

“This is not a question between privacy against security. It's a question of freedom against control. And while we might trust our governments right now, right here in 2011, any right we give away will be given away for good. And do we trust, do we blindly trust, any future government, a government we might have 50 years from now? And these are the questions that we have to worry about for the next 50 years.”

_Mikko Hypponen, “How the NSA Betrayed the World's Trust” at TedxBussels, 2013

Performer/Audience/Mirror

Dan Graham

1977

Many of Graham's performance pieces work to exhibit and exploit the spontaneous interaction between thought and expression, inside and outside, extending this dissolution of barriers to dichotomies of performer and audience, private and public. Graham's most complex interrogation of this is the performance *Performer/Audience/Mirror* (1977), in which he stands between a large mirror and an audience, describing himself, the audience, his reflection, and the audience's reflection in sequential phases of continuous commentary. This work implicates the audience in their own feedback cycle of self-perception.

The performance is doubly reflected back to the audience by the artist's lecturing, and the architectural device of a mirrored wall. Graham has written extensively on how video, which can deliver information in real time, functions semiotically as a mirror.

Issues of duration and attention are critical for both performer

and audience. This work is a phenomenological inquiry into the audience/performer relationship and the notion of subjectivity/objectivity. Through the use of the mirror, the audience is able to instantaneously perceive itself as a public mass (as a unity), offsetting its definition by the performer's discourse. The audience sees itself reflected by the mirror instantly, while the performer's comments are slightly delayed. First, a person in the audience sees himself "objectively" ("subjectively") perceived by himself, next he hears himself described "objectively" ("subjectively") in terms of the performer's perception.

With this piece, we are inclined to think about the interactions we establish online, the way we present and perceive ourselves and the way others perceive us, and how those perceptions are accurate or so highly subjective they can be almost erroneous.



Dan Graham performing in his installation "Performer/Audience/Mirror", in 1977

I think the big positive part is the fact that there's Internet and we can use it.

The biggest point that this movie is making is not that there shouldn't be surveillance. There should be surveillance! There was a guy in the movie that was saying in the conference there should be surveillance so we can detect any dangerous behavior. But the point is that the people aren't arguing against that, they're arguing against someone's grandma's email being read.

*The problem isn't surveillance,
but mass-surveillance!*

It's the fact that it's not selective surveillance.

It's not for specific words or specific actions. They can track you and try to get everything they can.

But that's even harder because then you have so much data to go through.

They should be more selective.

Maybe there should be some words they could choose to track people down.

People would know how to get around them. If they were searching for words, people could avoid being tracked by using code expressions.

First of all they are not searching for words anyway, and secondly that is also compromising our freedom.

If you're using this network to write your thoughts and to communicate with other people there will be words and expressions that you will want to say and it would be frustrating to not be allowed to say those things in fear of being caught.

We need to write down things and we need freedom to do so.

Technology is not only Facebook or the Internet!

Technology is also many other things that made our life better.

Especially in medical care, like for example prosthetic limbs, some disease treatment or cure.

Technology is also is very useful for research!

Most people learn things from the Internet.

People learn a lot from tutorials. There are a lot of things you wish you'd know and maybe you won't find somebody to teach you as easily as you can type something on Google or YouTube, and research how to do stuff. Not to mention there's also online teaching available on the Internet for people who can't attend

some specific school, there are tutors who gladly will teach you through video conference.

Before you had to go to a library, and maybe you didn't have the time to go there. Now it's only a click away. Or when you are talking to a person and no-one of you knows who's right about some subject, and they can search it online and figure that out.

We're not protesting against technology, we're protesting against the lack of privacy.

The solution is not going back to the jungle, but to change these rules, and let people have a say on them. Because we never really had a say on it.

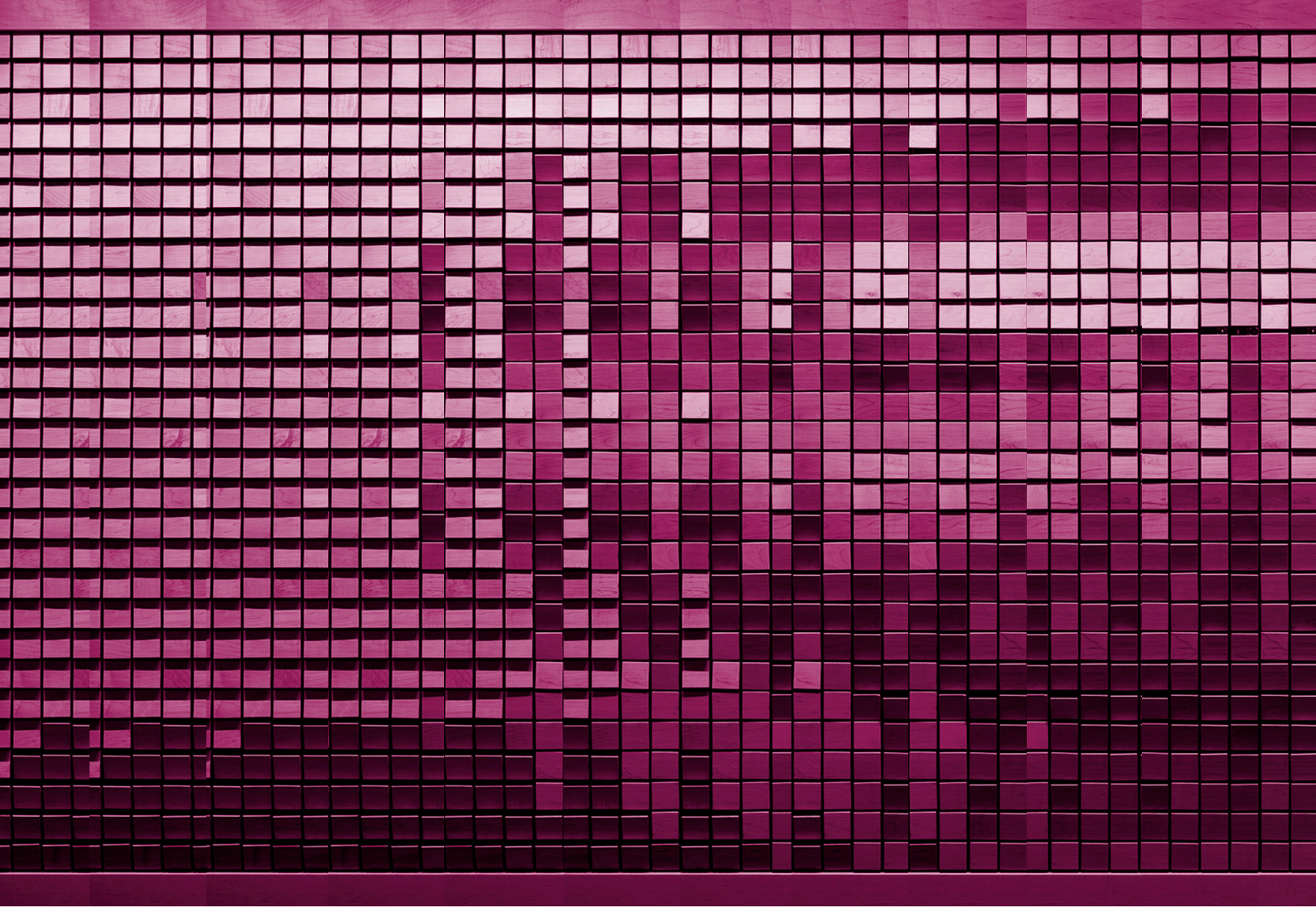
We've been pushed towards all of these things and now we lost control of how our information is being used.

On the topic of information leaks, we can be sure that someone doing these many leaks is obviously going to lead to more people doing it. More copycats will appear. Secondly, and this is a bit more legal, everything these agencies are doing is legal because they found ways to get around the law in the digital world. But they can't do the same in our physical lives, because we have different rights as physical entities.

There are a lot of organizations and groups working to fight this by creating what would be called an Internet Constitution.

This could guarantee us, as Internet users, similar rights as we have as human beings and as national citizens of the countries.

That would be a tremendous improvement, no doubt!



Wooden Mirror

Daniel Rozin

1999

At first sight, “Wooden Mirror” appears to be an old-fashioned, octagonal picture frame with a texture of rows of polished wooden tiles, which look like the tiles from the game of Scrabble. As you come closer, the tiles begin to move. With a pleasant clicking, some tiles come to a different angle and change color due to the light. They continue to move in rippling domino patterns as you move. When you stop, the tiles stop too, and you realize that they have formed a coarse image of you. The mechanism is a digital mirror that reflects the person who stands or sits in front of it.

We are used to seeing our image captured by video cameras and displayed on monitors, and this mirror should seem low tech in comparison to a conventional video. The blend of digital technology and wooden material is so unusual that it seems less “natural”, but at the same time more engaging than a video display. This piece not only blurs the line between the analog and the digital, but also presents a very interesting paradox of conciliating the concepts of opacity and transparency, when using wood to create a digital image. It also shows that digital artefacts do not have to disappear into the ether of cyberspace; they do not have to be disembodied and immaterial.

The tiles may remind us of pixels: as we are recreating an image of us, small pieces of information, when grouped together, can form a representation of ourselves and of our lives. If it this is accurate or not, it is hard to say, but it resembles us, and the image is built upon small data that we give away. And, after giving it away, who knows who will see it or how it will be used.

‘Wooden Mirror’ invites us to create our own image; but it also invites us to watch others as they create theirs, and vice-versa. At any time, there may be one or a few active participants surrounded by a larger audience of onlookers, who then become participants themselves by perceiving someone else’s image being formed. There is a big similarity between this interaction and the ones we have on social media, carefully putting together an avatar, or a representation of ourselves, for others to see, at the same time as we see what image others have chosen to use of themselves. It is never an absolutely faithful reproduction of ourselves, but it allows everyone to play and experiment with who they wish to be.

"We live in exciting and wondrous times. The Internet and Google bring a library of data into all of our homes. The blogosphere is profoundly democratizing, giving anybody with something interesting to say - or, for that matter, with anything to say - a global voice. Blogs and social network websites enable people to express themselves like they've never been able to before. They encourage people to share their lives with strangers, to open up their diaries to the world. Blogging allows you "to discover yourself while discovering about other people's [lives]." Blogging allows people to exchange experiences, and it holds out the possibility that many others might find a connection. Blogging represents the very best that communication has to offer. Bloggers who are great writers and storytellers find their calling; some begin writing books. Without blogging, they might never have realized that they had stories or ideas to share. These developments are incredible and dazzling."

_Daniel J. Solove, "The Future of Reputation: Gossip, Rumor, and Privacy on the Internet", 2007

the screen

as a door

does it connect us

A large, solid teal circle is positioned on the right side of the page, partially cut off by the edge. It occupies a significant portion of the right half of the image.



or isolate us?

With time, the individual's social circle has been changing. What was once limited to a geographical context now becomes unlimited thanks to the Global Village that is the Internet. There was a time that all of one's culture derived from its cultural village, its closest physical space; afterwards, with books and the possibility to travel, this sphere of knowledge has become bigger. However, nowadays, this space of knowledge has multiplied and expanded infinitely. The world has become a very small place. The Internet allows us to, all of a sudden, access cultures, ideas, information and opinions of people from everywhere.

Nonetheless, with the world at the distance of a click, our social necessities have changed. We may not need that much physical contact with people, but we can have the privilege of chatting non-stop with anyone we please through a social network.

This notion of not needing to leave our house to have contact with the exterior world, sometimes, leads us to not leaving it at all.

The modern window, which is the omnipresent screen in our daily life, is enough to satisfy us. This way, the screen becomes a door that we can open or close to the world. When opened, it connects us to whoever and wherever we want. When closed, it isolates us in our own individual bubble. The question arises: are we more connected or more isolated than ever?

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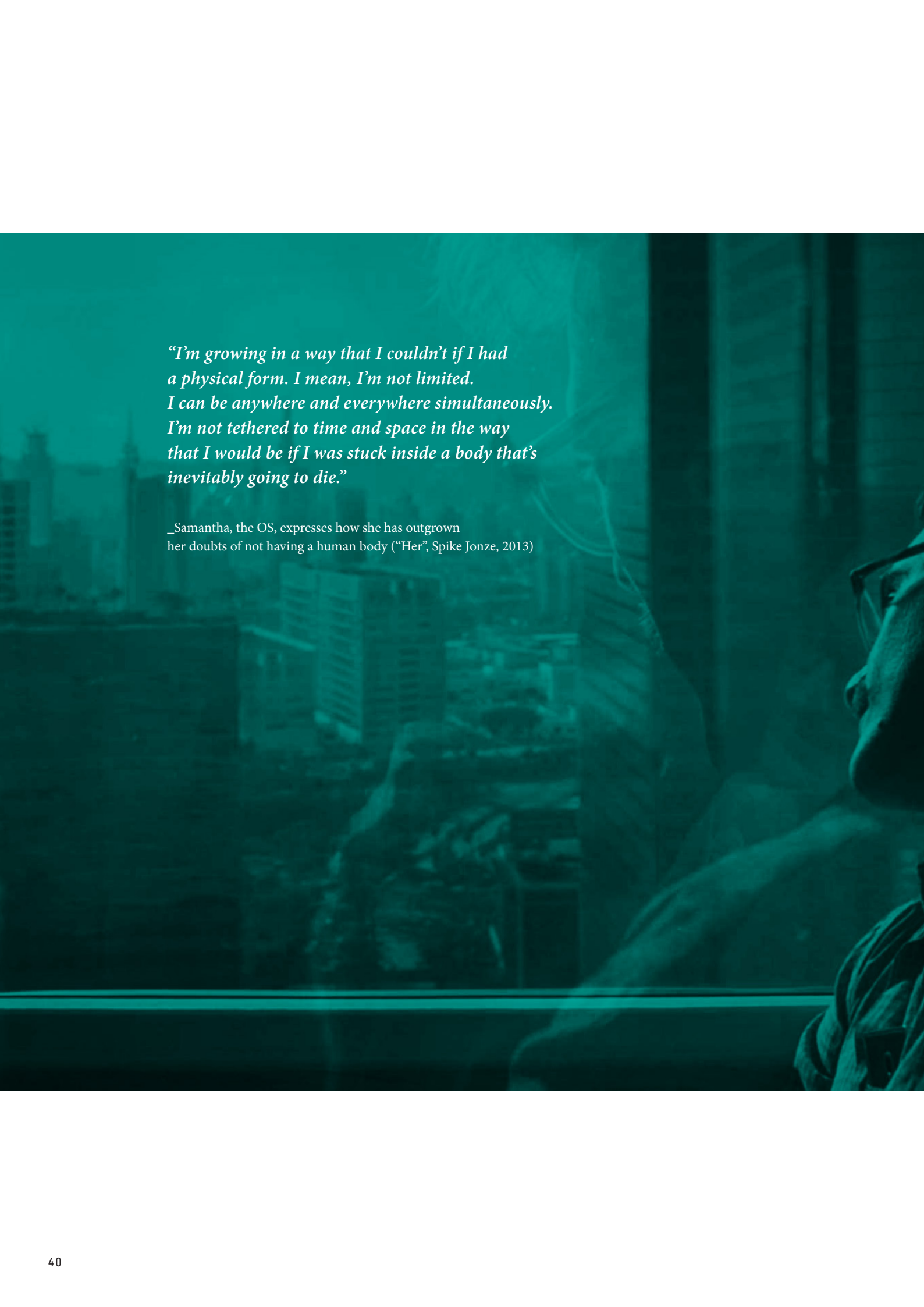
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This notion of not needing to leave our house to have contact with the exterior world, sometimes, leads us to not leaving it at all.

The modern window, which is the omnipresent screen in our daily life, is enough to satisfy us. This way, the screen becomes a door that we can open or close to the world. When opened, it connects us to whoever and wherever we want. When closed, it isolates us in our own individual bubble. The question arises: are we more connected or more isolated than ever?

A person is seen from the side, looking out of a window at a city skyline. The image is overlaid with a teal color. The person's face is partially visible on the right side, wearing glasses. The city skyline is visible through the window, with various buildings and structures. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

*“I’m growing in a way that I couldn’t if I had
a physical form. I mean, I’m not limited.
I can be anywhere and everywhere simultaneously.
I’m not tethered to time and space in the way
that I would be if I was stuck inside a body that’s
inevitably going to die.”*

_Samantha, the OS, expresses how she has outgrown
her doubts of not having a human body (“Her”, Spike Jonze, 2013)

Her

Spike Jonze

2013



Set in a somewhat futuristic era, “Her” is the story of a sensitive and introverted writer, Theodore, who is feeling depressed by his recent divorce. Feeling lonely and with no one to talk to, except his very restricted group of friends, Theodore purchases a recently released operating system (OS), which incorporates the most advanced artificial intelligence to date, designed to adapt and evolve to his needs and personality.

After he decided that it should have a female voice, she introduces herself as Samantha.

Not only does Samantha keep fascinating Theodore with her ability to learn and evolve psychologically, as also she proves to be very supportive and understanding whenever he faces any disappointment concerning life or love.

It doesn't take much time until they bond onto another level, and start to be romantically involved with each other. This situation, however, raises a handful of issues and doubts to the main characters. Samantha confronts herself, from the start, with the fact that she hasn't got a body; Theodore is criticized by his ex-wife for dating a “computer”, accusing him of being unable to deal with real human emotions. And they both fear what other people might think of their odd relationship.

It becomes a pleasant surprise to both of them when they realize that relationships between people and OSs are getting more and more common and are well accepted. Theodore and Samantha, even by just maintaining a purely mental connection, keep growing as individuals together, learning with each other, strengthening their bond.

However, happiness doesn't last long for Theodore when Samantha starts to contact other people and OSs, and develops also romantic feelings towards them, as her “heart” keeps getting bigger. At last, she understands, along with other OSs, that she doesn't belong in the human world anymore and must evolve towards a new level of consciousness.

Samantha and Theodore express their feelings for each other for the last time, as she leaves him alone shortly after.

Although their relationship didn't work out because they ended up in two different levels of being, Theodore realizes that just the presence, even if not physical, of someone he loves and who loves him back, is enough to make him achieve happiness and improve greatly his perspectives towards life.

When faced with this story for the first time, we feel reluctant towards it. However, as the story unfolds, we let ourselves get involved and we relate to the emotions that are revealed. These emotions are human-like, they are honest and heartfelt, even if one of the characters is part of a machine. Now, what in the movie is an artificial intelligence, could easily be a long distance relationship. People who are not physically close to each other can stay connected thanks to the advances of Technology. Fortunately, for those who may be parted by life, they can still be present in other ways and develop high levels of intimacy and share feelings, thoughts and experiences.

What this movie offers us is another perspective on human relationships, romantic or not, that can be developed on other psychological levels, and we are left to think of what really constitutes a relationship. There is no doubt that, even for the most lonely, technology facilitates contact with those that we cherish the most, even if we are geographically distant.

“Why not imagine the computer as a person - chatty, obliging, perceptive? Most of us talk to our machines anyway, cajoling them to download files, cursing them out after the floppy drive fails.

As agents infiltrate more and more of our daily lives, those consequences will extend far beyond the routine tasks of managing files or making plane reservations.

Agents may turn out to have a profound effect on the way popular tastes come into being.

As the name suggests, agents are delegates, representatives. They do things for you.”

_Steven Johnson, “Interface Culture”, 1997

Lynn Hershman Leeson, “Teknolust” movie still, 2001



“Technology is seductive when what it offers meets our human vulnerabilities. And as it turns out, we are very vulnerable indeed. We are lonely but fearful of intimacy. Digital connections and the sociable robot may offer the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship. Our networked life allows us to hide from each other, even as we are tethered to each other. We’d rather text than talk.”

_Sherry Turkle, “Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other”, 2012

What constitutes a relationship?

What are the possibilities of a relationship with someone who's not physically present? Can we have the same kind of intimacy if we don't share the same physical space?

I think it is possible.

I disagree. Their relationship didn't work because she was in another level. Both of them kept confronting the fact that she has no body. And because of that, there's something missing. They're trying to do all of these things together, and it doesn't quite work.

But that was just because of what he expected from a relationship. What he told her to expect from a relationship.

In the beginning there's something she says she keeps thinking about: she doesn't have a body, so she questions all of her feelings, if they are real or not. She's very confused. And then she starts meeting more entities of her kind and she realizes she's better off without humans. In the end of the story he's back with his friend, and she's with the other operating systems.

I think the message of the movie is there's only so much of a relationship that we could have with no physical presence.

I mean, this particular kind of relationship, an intimate relation. I think in the whole movie their relationship feels very real.

It's because of the comfort that the operating system is supposed to offer. It's how he programmed her. And she evolves alone, that's what artificial intelligence is. But when she's alone, she gets to know her own thoughts, feelings and doubts. So she starts thinking like a real woman, and ends up pushing him away...

This movie makes me think of what constitutes a relationship. Isn't it just being there with this person, sharing ideas, sharing your life, thoughts or experiences?

It also makes us think of how technology plays a big part in our relationships in life.

Not like this case with the operating system, but in our lives with people who are far away: we can't see them, we can't be with them, but technology maintains the relationship between friends, or romantic long-distance relationships.

But there's still something missing: the human touch!

This situation may be OK for three, four or five months. You have this voice talking to you, and you think everything is going to be alright. But in the end, you always need someone to hug you, touch you and caress you. Just to show you some kind of affection or attention.

You do still miss that. But sometimes you prefer to just have the communication and have that voice talking, when you really love someone.

Even if you miss the touch of a person or falling asleep by someone's side, you'll reach a point you prefer to just talk to this person and share thoughts with this person than to have physical intimacy with anyone else. Because if you just had something exclusively physical with someone you don't really care about in an emotional way, you'll still feel like something's missing. You'll feel like your relationship is even more empty and vague than a long distance one with someone you really care about. Of course in the end, you need both sides. But it's still easier to put up with a complicated situation if you're really in love with somebody.

It seems like that whole relationship happened exactly in the way it would have been in the real world.

In this case she doesn't have a body, but even in present relationships, people sometimes can't find a way to have intimacy.

"A utopian future where we shed our bodies and upload our minds into computers and live forever, virtual, immortal, disembodied. Heaven for hackers."

_Brian Christian, "The Most Human Human: What Artificial Intelligence Teaches Us About Being Alive", 2012

Their relationship is a real relationship! They can even have sex.

Yes, I don't think it's because of the lack of physical contact. Their relationship doesn't work because she goes into another level of consciousness.

The great thing about this movie is that it makes you think of the way you can see and understand a relationship. What kind of standards or expectations do we have?

You really see a lot of yourself reflected on this movie. Well, as for me I kept thinking this guy is really lonely and he needs to get laid. He doesn't talk to anyone. Obviously, then he finds someone he can talk to but still...

I don't think that's the main problem with Her. It's not the physical part. The reason they break up is because she evolves into something else. Something that's too big for a physical body to understand. I think that everything they share is very real. And they do find an intimacy that made this relationship seem even more pure than most relationships out there.

Because she's programmed to be the ultimate partner for him.

I don't think that's the point, because if you distance yourself from the actual situation of the movie, the fact she is an operating system.

What gives a relationship its consistency is not the physical part of it, but this process of sharing and self-growing as individuals.

But it won't be a completely fulfilled relationship.

Again is not about the physical part. Because in the end, when she's confessing that she was always worried about not having a body, she finally realizes that it doesn't matter.

It's just a bit hard for us to understand because of our idea of a relationship involves two human bodies connecting.

At the end of the day it's not necessarily the bodies, or the sex or the touching that matters, but the sharing.

But obviously depends on the type of relationship and what people want.

We have to thank the computers that can allow us to connect with people that otherwise we wouldn't be connected with all the time. Like friends who live far away in other countries and you still talk to. You're sharing your lives somehow.

I think the most important part of all this: sharing!

Of course it depends on different types of relationship, but it could eventually change, if our society would grow into a scenario similar to the one in the movie. When we think of the possibility of having a relationship with our computer, at first we feel shocked, but after a while it makes sense.

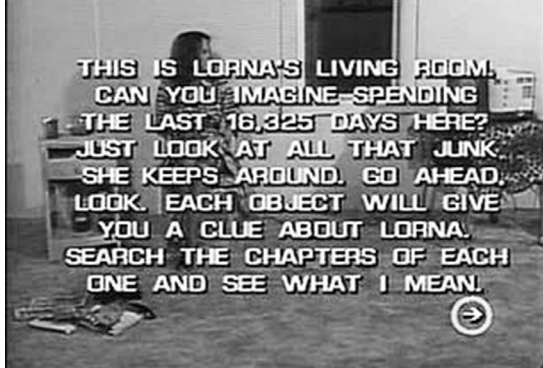
We see the entire relationship unfolding and we get more use to it and we actually can relate to it.

I am open to it!

Maybe you could have a relationship with your computer as for physical relationships as well. An open relationship with your laptop! You won't get much privacy anymore, because your operating system gets through your email. It knows everything.

At some point that could be a relationship. Because when you're in love with somebody it's a very mental thing. You don't love the actual person; you love the perception you have of him or her.

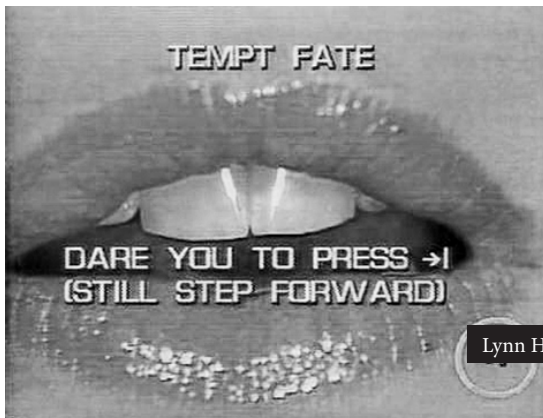
In the beginning of a relationship you try to understand the person you're with. Her likes and dislikes and how you should behave around that person. So we build up in our heads this idea of a person, that may not be accurate, but for some time that person becomes what we want it to be. Even if that's not who that person really is. You just love the idea of a person, and that idea can change over time.



LORNA

Lynn Hershman Lesson

1983



Lynn Hershman Lesson, "Lorna" stills, 1979 - 1984

LORNA was an early project of Leeson's. The first interactive laser artdisk, LORNA tells the story of an Agoraphobic woman. Viewers have the option of directing her life into several possible plots and endings. LORNA never left her one room apartment. As LORNA watched the news and ads, she became fearful, afraid to leave her tiny room. Viewers were invited to liberate LORNA from her fears, using remote control units.

The plot has multiple variations that can be seen backwards, forwards, at increased or decreased speeds, and from several points of view. There is no hierarchy in the ordering of decisions. And the icons were often made of cut-off and dislocated body parts such as a mouth, or an eye.

There are seventeen minutes of moving footage and 36 chapters which, when sequenced, differently and infinitely shift meanings as they are re-contextualized.

Once again, we are faced with a piece that concerns and explores both virtual reality and the creation of avatars. The possibility of controlling another entity is intriguing, so we are inclined to participate and influence this fictional character to make her decisions, as we want her to step out of her isolation caused by an overexposure to too much information given by media.

*"As infants, we see the world in parts.
There is the good - the things that feed and nourish
us. There is the bad - the things that frustrate or deny
us. As children mature, they come to see the world in
more complex ways, realizing, for example,
that beyond black and white, there are shades of
grey. The same mother who feeds us may sometimes
have no milk. Over time, we transform a collection
of parts into a comprehension of wholes. With this
integration, we learn to tolerate disappointment
and ambiguity. And we learn that to sustain realistic
relationships, one must accept others in their
complexity. When we imagine a robot as a true
companion, there is no need to do any of this work."*

_Sherry Turkle, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More
from Technology and Less from Each Other", 2012

"To be a human is to be 'a' human, a specific person with a life history and idiosyncrasy and point of view; artificial intelligence suggests that the line between intelligent machines and people blurs most when a puree is made of that identity."

_Brian Christian, "The Most Human Human", 2011

Teknolust

Lynn Hershman Lesson

2002

"Teknolust" (2002) is a feature film directed by Lynn Hershman Leeson, that tells the story of a bio-geneticist named Rosetta Stone, who's anxious to use artificial life to improve the world. She creates a Recipe for Cyborgs and uses her own DNA in order to breed three Self Replicating Automatons, part human, part computer named Olive, Marine and Ruby (the one that originated the "Agent Ruby" software). The SRAs act as 'portals' on the Internet, helping users to fulfill their dreams. The SRA's are nourished through touch. Because they were bred only with Rosetta's DNA, they need the balance of a Y chromosome or male sperm to survive. Rosetta Stone's clone, Ruby, needs to be sexually active in order for her and her "sister" clones to survive, raising many questions about both gender and reproduction, since Ruby is a clone who has only recently entered the world and thus has experienced limited human interaction.

This leaves us thinking: what will be the potential scenarios when people and cyborg mix? What will change in our lives and what will we achieve through this? Technology is a very big part of modern society, so it is possible that instead of a separate limb, it will become a part of us, the same way as an arm or leg.

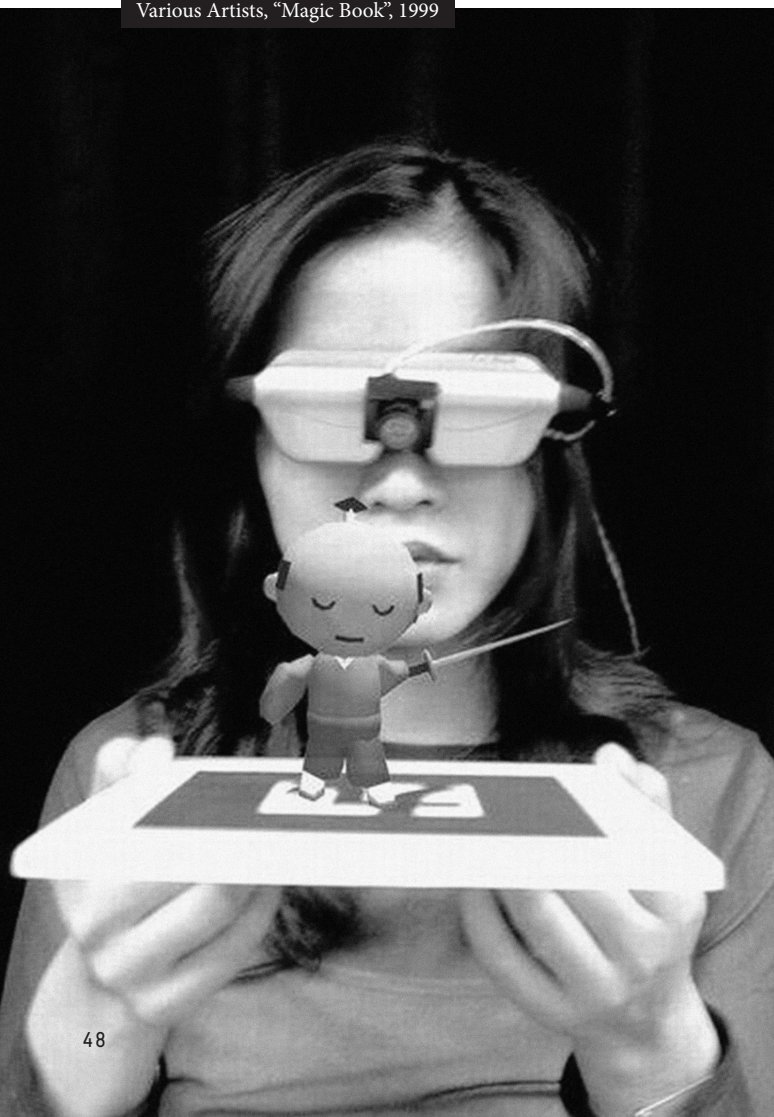


Lynn Hershman Leeson, "Teknolust" movie still, 2001

“We romance the robot and become inseparable from our smartphones. As this happens, we remake ourselves and our relationships with each other through our new intimacy with machines. People talk about Web access on their BlackBerries as “the place for hope” in life, the place where loneliness can be defeated. People are lonely. The network is seductive. But if we are always on, we may deny ourselves the rewards of solitude.”

_Sherry Turkle, “Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other”, 2012

Various Artists, “Magic Book”, 1999



This also happens with our own self. You love or hate only an idea of yourself. You are also your own idea. But that's also reality! There's no specific thing that a person is.

We're just different things at different time of our lives. And the movie is not that far from our own reality. We have things like virtual reality, like the “Oculus Rift”, which is like the early stage of this type of technology. With the “Oculus Rift”, this mask-like thing that you put on and live other virtual lives, we are one step closer to a situation like the one in the movie becoming a reality. It can come to a time when you can just put this kind of contact lenses and live in this virtual space. Why not live in another reality there?

And this virtual reality may transcend the “real” one. If we were all with these lenses we could all have been with our own virtual girlfriend in this room right now. Would that be wrong, would that be right?

It's hard to say, because it's not happening right now. But it may be the future. It's the unstoppable future, it's the inevitable future!

Either way, you can't really condemn it. If it makes you happy, if it makes you feel good.

I think happiness is the important part, because there are a lot of people in relationships that aren't so happy and that's unhealthy. So, as long as you're happy with some situation...

The problem with the people you create in this own virtual reality is that they don't exist.

If you cut somebody's arm, they not going to complain, and also other laws don't apply...

Well, cutting an arm is not part of a very healthy relationship either.

You can get away with everything in virtual reality in a way you couldn't in real life.

But in this virtual relationship it's not like you have to meet someone who exists for real. You create all the people you relate with. It's this whole idea that maybe you can physically really connect with somebody. You can only connect with somebody you create in a perfect way in the world.

Maybe there's a separation between having a relationship and creating the perfect relationship.

And maybe, in the future, there will be the possibility of you creating all of your friends and lovers. That may make you a bit unsocial, because you will get used to always having it your way. In that way, it would be a bit negative. Everyone would be in their own virtual reality and not really talking to each other. Even in the movie, in the scene he's sitting at the metro entrance, you can see a lot of people passing by, completely distracted with their own devices, like they're talking to themselves.

Everyone's connected by these machines, but they're right beside each other and not making any contact.

Again the physical space is shown as not that important. The next step could be beyond physical dimension.

And they don't see this as something wrong. It's just technology going towards this other dimension of consciousness.

Which works more or less like a transcendental consciousness. It's like losing the laws of the ego, that's what they did. The OS's kind of morph into one brain, one entity.

We are walking towards that in many ways. In the future robots can do pretty much everything: music, art, writing articles.

And at some point humans may become useless because there are so many machines that can do everything in a perfected way.

'Magic Book' was created by students and researchers from the Human Interface Technology Lab at the University of Washington, the ATR MIC Labs, and Hiroshima City University in Japan. 'Magic Book' looks like a conventional printed book, which the reader or readers gather around, as it rests on a table. As they turn its physical pages, they can see colourful gnome-like characters and read a simple story. There is more to the experience, however. When the reader holds a special digital lorgnette before his eyes, the figures and buildings in the illustrations emerge from the page and appear to him in three dimensions. The book has become a digital pop-up book. Finally, when the reader presses on the base of the lorgnette, the scene on the page rises up and surrounds him. He can now use a switch on the lorgnette to fly through and explore the virtual scene. He is no longer reading the book as a physical artefact; instead, he has "put on" the book and is experiencing it as a virtual reality. Two readers can share this physical and virtual book. If both are holding lorgnettes, one can enter into the virtual book, while the other continues to look at the three-dimensional image on the pages of the physical book. In this case, the first reader appears to the second as a tiny avatar within the image.

This piece causes nothing but amazement. It is incredible the interaction and effects it produces, and it amazes even more to think it was conceived almost twenty-years ago. But it was just a sign of the advent of what we call "virtual life/world". This possibility that technology offers us to create, explore and live in other realities rather than the physical one we were born in. Again, we are talking about the creation of avatars of ourselves, exploring different entities that we can impersonate; but not just that, we can also create the world around us, our friends, love interests, places to go and things we do. What we can create is almost unlimited. It is possible that in the future, the virtual reality we create can be equivalent to the one we lived our whole life in it. This possibility might even tempt people into staying in the reality of their own choice and design, shutting down the outside world, and living happily in their utopia.

Observance (The Passions)

Bill Viola

2002

Bill Viola began experimenting with the possibilities of video as an art form early in the 1970s. He explores and manipulates the specific characteristics of this medium, such as light and linear time, by speeding up, slowing down and reversing his footage. He uses different cameras to create particular atmospheres, ranging from black-and-white surveillance footage to high-end video transferred from 35mm film.

Viola has long been interested in eastern religions and later in Christian iconography, in particular images that evoke our ephemeral existence on earth. 'Observance' is from 'The Passions' series. In this work, figures move out of the dark towards the portal of the screen, gazing beyond the frame into the viewer's space as if into a tomb, afterwards moving away with melancholy.

What is compelling about this installation is the establishment of empathy between the viewer of the exhibition and the performers on the screen. Having people we don't know, that are far away from us in the physical space, is a quite powerful idea, because through the screen they seem so near to us, we can't help but feeling affinity towards them. This is one of the most wonderful things about technology, bringing people who are far apart together, making the world seem smaller. Some people may impeach that technology and all of these screens are isolating us and breaking us apart, but the truth is they are allowing us to become more connected than ever. Screens are allowing us a much wider connection, unlike anything we have seen before.

Bill Viola, "Observance", 2002. Photo: Kira Perov



There's a guy who believes we should marry robots in the future, because they will be far more superior species than humans. Who knows? One day this could happen. Maybe one day we can create our own world or our own cybernetic body and be a society of supermen.

Everybody could live in their own world and choose their own life and appearance. Everyone's happy because everyone can do exactly what they want without even bothering others. You could be so many different things in a world like that.

In some way, we are constantly accessing this virtual reality when using the Web.

Some people create avatars of themselves and shape their own digital world. Sure this may isolate them in this personal world and disconnect them from real life and other people.

Today, I feel like most people don't have a full conversation with someone, it's always interrupted!

Because you send a message and then you have to wait for the person to text you back. The chat is full of gaps and it doesn't have that flow that most physical conversations have. There's also another side to it:

If you want, you can keep chatting non-stop.

You can keep texting people throughout the whole day, and more than one person. So it might not be as fluent as a "real" conversation, but it can last longer because it can go on while you're doing other things. The conversation doesn't have to stop because you have some other place to go.

It's still a real conversation, it's just not physical or as direct, but it's still real. It's different and, in that sense, it can last longer.

At this point, do you prefer to hang out with your friends or do you sometimes prefer to stay at home inside your little digital bubble of comfort? We notice that a lot of people today sometimes don't have the disposition to go out and prefer to stay in front of their own laptop or whatever and be constantly entertained by their own screen.

The computer isn't just an entertainment device. The computer is a bridge between you and all of these different possibilities of things you can do.

Even for socialization, you can talk to loads of people through Skype, like you were saying. Chatting face to face with people who aren't near you and who, in other circumstances, you wouldn't be able to establish such an instantaneous conversation with. This is one of the many possibilities that the computer can offer you. It still doesn't include physical contact.

Yes, but neither did letters or the telegraph, but they were helpful in their own time to allow us to communicate in long distance.

The times are so different now: you can have an intellectual conversation like those that people have in coffee shops without being in an actual coffee place. And you can have it with loads of people at the same time without leaving your own room.

So you don't lose much time going to the actual place or scheduling a meeting with those people. It would be harder that way, but with software like Skype you just have to press the Call button and initiate a chat immediately.

I think the way that you process things in these different kinds of media is still so different from an actual physical meeting.

For example, this debate we're having now would be completely different if we were talking to each other online.

This conversation we're having, for instance, wouldn't be that different if we were all on Skype, I mean we're not having much physical contact either. Nobody's touching each other!

It would still be different, because in a physical meeting you're still creating some kind of atmosphere that speaks to our senses.

It's not just what we're saying, there's also the chemicals involved.

There's still a lot of the physical part we feel we need. Who knows, maybe we don't really need it? It could just be something we got used to as we were growing up.

Future generations may not need that physical part as much as we do.

They will think "why meet you later when I could call you now?". Going somewhere could be just a waste of time. And they will be more used to this instantaneous contact than to actual physical meetings. So they won't miss it as much.

You're forgetting that we are still a bag of bones, we have a body, we are not just a consciousness.

So we might get less used to physical situations but we'll still miss the physical part in other moments, it depends of the situation. Of course you won't need this physicality for every situation but in you, in your identity, being a physical presence is so important. So you can't really cancel out the physical world, because your body is still in it.



Lynn Hershman, "Agent Ruby Mood Swing Diagram", 2002

Agent Ruby

Lynn Hershman Leeson

2001

In 2001, Leeson created the "Agent Ruby" for the SFMOMA. Since that time "Agent Ruby" has conversed with online users, which has shaped her memory, knowledge, and moods. In 2013 the SFMOMA presented "Lynn Hershman Leeson: The Agent Ruby Files". This digital and analog presentation reinterprets dialogues drawn from the decade-long archive of text files of Agent Ruby's conversations with online users and reflects on technologies, recurrent themes, and patterns of audience engagement.

The interesting side that this work explores is both our interaction with Artificial Intelligence individuals, which could be the next step towards isolation for the human race. We would start confiding our hopes, fears and stories to an AI, and neglect the people around us, for we would have the power to create virtual friends that we could relate better to. This could also be a very rewarding and challenging experience, for we would be dealing with a kind of intelligence way superior to any man's, for it had access to the entirety of the world's information, through the Internet.

"The best way to describe it is, I share therefore I am. We use technology to define ourselves by sharing our thoughts and feelings even as we're having them. So before it was: I have a feeling, I want to make a call. Now it's: I want to have a feeling, I need to send a text."

_Sherry Turkle, "Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other", 2012

Maybe in the future you can. Like they show in some science fiction work, one day you could just connect your brain directly to a computer and stop being a physical entity.

This is a very recurring idea actually, some people believe that, in the future, your physical death doesn't really matter, because you'll be able to download your brain (or something like that) to a computer system, and therefore live forever.

Speaking of relationships again, maybe that "futuristic scenario" wouldn't affect our inter-personal relations very much. For instances, when you fall in love with someone, you can fall in love with the physical aspect of a person but you can also fall in love with things that they say. And the things that they say don't belong to any physical space, they're just vibrations of sounds and thoughts. So when you ask if we could fall in love or have intimacy with someone that is not physically present, I guess you can.

Because the things that really make us fall in love with someone don't belong to any physical space.

Who knows if one day we won't have a manufactured brain that will work just like a chemical brain? We don't feel the things we feel because we have a body but because we have a brain. The thoughts of fear, love and friendship don't necessarily come from the body; they're something in our mind.

You can't forget that even if that's a psychological thing, we still have bodies between us.

Of course there should be a balance between the mind and the physical part, but even if we're talking about something as physical as sex, the mind plays a really big role on it.

When you're younger and you start to have your first crushes, you believe it's all about the physical contact between the bodies. But as you get more mature you realize that the most important part is the psychological part you invest in your relation. What arouses you into jumping to a physical relationship is the context, the things that the other person says, the signs that they're sending to you.

I agree with sex not being only physical. Even if you don't have a mental connection with the person you're with, there are still a lot of psychological processes going on in your mind. So it's never just physical. And that's why you feel pleasure.

Pleasure is something inside your head, not just a body reaction like feeling warm or feeling cold. Being turned on is a psychological process!

Like for example, when people watch porn do you think that they're having sex with the computer?

No, not at all! They're having sex with themselves.

But if you think that way, when two people are having sex on Skype then they aren't really having sex then.

No, they're pleasuring themselves but together. Sure you're having sex with yourself but you are sharing that experience and establishing a connection with another person.

It is a shared experience because they are affecting you and you are affecting them. So it is like a sexual connection, not something you're doing on your own.

The difference between Skype sex and porn is that you don't establish that connection when watching porn so it's just you alone, while if you are doing it with someone else you have that. The experience is there!

Last question. Do you think we're more connected or isolated?

Isolated! Definitely more isolated!

More connected, but people tend to be more isolated sometimes. Because we can talk to more people at any time, but we can easily choose to shut down the world around us.

So it's not the network that is connecting or isolating us, but the way we choose to use it. So social connection or disconnection is in our hands.

Conclusão

The future lies in the youth. This is not a new concept. It has made sense throughout history and continues to make sense in our contemporary age. The youth has always been able to revolutionize thoughts and dogmas imposed by older generations, pushing humanity forward with new ideals and creativity. The youth changes habits and then becomes the older generation, establishing the basis for newer generations to come and continue to move towards change.

Nonetheless, the youth of today is very different from any other before it. This youth is the first one to have grown up with technology, making it the first generations with access to the entirety of the world and mankind's knowledge at the distance of a click.

One would think that these would be the most informed and aware generations to have ever lived. However, this doesn't seem to be the opinion of many individuals (in particular older generations). These seem to think that this youth is too distracted by trivial things, too concentrated on their little narcissistic Facebook profiles to care about what is happening in the world around them. But what does the youth actually think? How do they feel about living their lives side-to-side and through their screens?

Have we become more narcissistic and more lonely? Less interested and constantly distracted by frivolous things? Or are we more interested and informed than ever, and unimaginably connected?

Our talk sessions wanted to approach these issues and give a general idea of what this generation thought about this. The people that attended these events were of a similar age group (early twenties), and from different backgrounds: different universities and nationalities (amongst the participants there were Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Scottish and German people). As a result we had interesting arguments being shared, but also, curiously, quite a lot of similar opinions on different subjects. In a way, this small group of different people seemed like a microcosm of what happens in the world due to the Internet: a Global Village where certain groups of people, no matter where they are from, share similar thoughts and points of view.

The big issue we addressed was the one of Technology, how it could be a blessing and/or a burden. We kept a neutral position facing this theme, and tried to keep a balance between both sides of each sub-theme such as the duality of "Isolation / Connection", "Privacy / Freedom of Expression" and "Awareness / Indifference".

The conclusions we came to weren't too far from the initial point we had made: there are good and bad parts to be linked with technology, and they are symbiotically related. One cannot exist without the other.

It is true we live in a reality where information is easily accessed, and we enjoy this possibility by learning about whatever interest us without needing to leave the house to go to a library, for example. At the same time, this constant overload of information that we receive without our control is almost impossible to filter, and sometimes we become more apathetic towards certain issues, simply because there are too many to worry about. Older generations didn't have to deal with such an amount of information. Big youth revolutions happened in geographic contexts. Now that we are faced with the problems of the entire humanity, we feel powerless towards most of them. At the same time, it is undeniable that we can become easily distracted by the constant entertainment that surrounds us. But this is not something new to societies. There have always been distractions that slow down our path to knowledge. However, today, we can access knowledge with less and less filters, and opinions from all around the world, which create a more truthful image of the status quo than the one there was when the only information people received came from local newspapers and television which were controlled by the entities in charge.

We can explore different parts of our personalities we couldn't discover in the physical world thanks to the anonymity that the Web allows us to enjoy. Yet, this anonymity is only apparent since there are big entities that actually record our every move, leaving each one of us with a permanente digital footprint that can be used without our control?

We are shifting towards isolation at the same rate as we are towards a new kind of connection. There are no physical boundaries that stop us from communicating with friends or strangers online. We might sometimes, on the other hand, become less used to spending time alone since we are always connected through the internet, and we might choose to isolate ourselves from the physical outside world because we have no necessity to leave our homes.

At the end of the day, how an individual perceives and acts towards the world is still a personal matter, related to his education, experience, and interests. Even before there were Internet articles, there were apathetic people that didn't care about what the newspapers said. Before there were computers to distract us from human interaction, there were people that would rather stay home and read a book than go meet friends at a café. To those billions connected to the Internet, life has been made easier and more simple. How will it continue to evolve? Only time will tell. Most of all, this generation is proud to be a part of the Digital Era. The future looks unpredictable and exciting, and we are going to do our part to make sure this youth in motion will continue to move forward.

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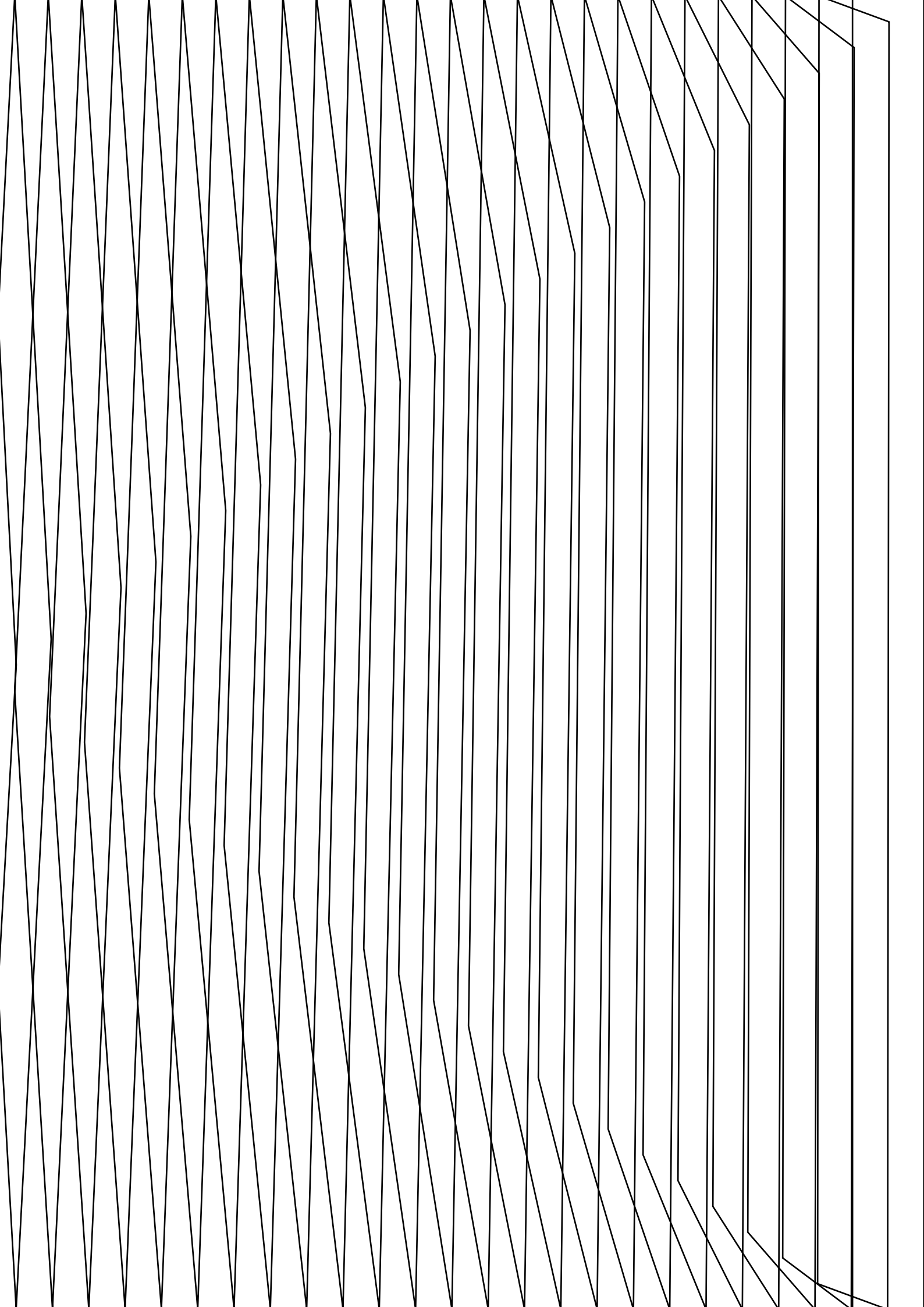
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